



## SEANAD ÉIREANN

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*Déardaoin, 2 Feabhra 2006.*  
*Thursday, 2 February 2006.*  
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Chuaigh an Cathaoirleach i gceannas ar 10.35 a.m.

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*Paidir.*  
*Prayer.*  
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### Business of Seanad.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I have received notice from Senator Mansergh that, on the motion for the Adjournment of the House today, he proposes to raise the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment to make a statement on the announcement of the forthcoming closure of the Sram factory in Carrick-on-Suir, County Tipperary, and to outline the steps the agencies under his aegis propose to take to assist those affected to find alternative comparable employment.

I have also received notice from Senator Moylan of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Health and Children to outline the current position of the much needed 20 bed age care unit extension to the Riada House, Tullamore, County Offaly, and if she will make a statement on the matter.

I have also received notice from Senator Coghlan of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to address the situation regarding the unanimous request of Killarney Town Council and numerous other interested parties, in the provision of much-needed land at Church Road, Muckross, as a burial ground in the best interests of the entire community.

I have also received notice from Senator Feighan of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Health and Children to outline the plans she has for psychiatric services in County Roscommon, and if there will be a reduction in services in the future.

I have also received notice from Senator Browne of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment to outline the reason

no new businesses have been brought to the new IDA centre in Carlow town and when he expects a decision on same.

I regard the matters raised by the Senators as suitable for discussion on the Adjournment. I have selected the matters raised by Senators Mansergh, Moylan and Coghlan and they will be taken at the conclusion of business. Senators Feighan and Browne may give notice on another day of the matter they wish to raise.

Before calling the Leader of the House, I point out that the time for the Order of Business has been extended to 40 minutes. However, yesterday's Order of Business took 50 minutes, which is ten minutes longer. I do not like to be put in the position of being required to exclude Senators who wish to speak on the Order of Business when the time is up. I appeal for a little co-operation in this regard.

### Order of Business.

**Ms O'Rourke:** The Order of Business is Nos. 11 and 2. Lest Members wonder why we will begin at No. 11, I should explain that a slip in the configuration resulted in "1" becoming "11". No. 11 is a motion on draft regulations that were referred to the Joint Committee on Enterprise and Small Business, which has completed its consideration. The draft Companies (Auditing and Accounting) Act 2003 (Prescribed Accountancy Bodies) Regulations 2006 prescribe the Association of International Accountants, the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy as prescribed bodies for the purposes of section 48(1)(a) of the Companies (Auditing and Accounting) Act 2003. The motion on the draft regulations will be taken without debate. That is surely enough about accountants for today; and No 2, statements on Northern Ireland. The statements will be taken on the conclusion of the Order of Business and will conclude no later than 1.30 p.m. Spokespersons will have 15 minutes and other Senators will have ten minutes.

**Mr. B. Hayes:** There was a fair degree of controversy on yesterday's Order of Business about the President's remarks on the issue of 1916—

**An Cathaoirleach:** I should rule that out of order.

**Mr. B. Hayes:** A Chathaoirligh, my remarks will not be controversial. Having read the President's speech in full last night — I did not have a chance to do so beforehand — I was struck by the part of her speech in which she remarked that this year is the 90th anniversary not just of the 1916 Rising but of the Battle of the Somme. The President is right to highlight the fact that the commemoration could be a point of reconcili-

[Mr. B. Hayes.]

ation for every person on the island of Ireland. I remind the House that 35,000 Irishmen gave their lives in the Great War, yet we have no plaque, statue or listing in the Houses of the Oireachtas to commemorate their great contribution in what was one of the most appalling battles ever fought, not just for human civilisation but for Ireland. They were fighting for Ireland and were doing as John Redmond said on that famous occasion at Woodenbridge when he stated, "We must go where the fighting is fiercest". I agree with the President that this joint commemoration of the Battle of the Somme and 1916 would not only be good for this Republic but would be good in terms of reaching out and stretching the hand of friendship to Northern Ireland. It is in the context of those remarks that we should pitch the debate on 1916 and on the Battle of the Somme.

Over the past number of years Senator Mooney has very bravely raised the issue of the Shot at Dawn Campaign. I joined this campaign much later than he. I seek a debate on that issue in the coming weeks because developments are apace in London and we need to be kept up to date on what the Government is doing.

**An Cathaoirleach:** The President is independent of this House and I would not like there to be a debate on what she said or reference to be made as to whether Senators are in favour or against. It would be unfair of this House to proceed in that manner.

**Mr. O'Toole:** As this year is the 90th anniversary of the 1916 Rising, it is worth discussing it. The year 1916 was a time of extraordinary change but there has been no acknowledgement of it. People are afraid of their past in that regard. There were decent people in the Royal Irish Constabulary as well as in the various volunteer forces. There was Tom Kettle as well as Tom Clark. Some people gave much to make this country what it is. It is only in recent years that I have read the statements taken by the State in 1946 from people who lived through that period. Those statements were taken in confidence and were locked away in the military history archives in Beggars Bush. When one reads them, one sees it was about ordinary people.

This is the year in which we should grow up, acknowledge our past and welcome the Queen of a neighbouring country. We should be grown up and developed enough to do that without trying to justify physical force or argue about who are the true successors of 1916. That is irrelevant. The successors of 1916 are all the people.

We have all come from a generation where Irish history at school finished in 1916. It is time we acknowledged it happened and its rights and wrongs. People were in favour of it while others were opposed. That is what people want to say. For me, however, it is not about that but about reading the fourth paragraph of the proclamation

and the vision therein and about seeing if we have reached it yet and where we go from here. It is not about the rights and wrongs. It would be completely wrong to try to apply the views of today to that time. We should openly discuss 1916.

**Mr. Ryan:** I never argue with the Cathaoirleach's rulings and I will not do so on this occasion. However, I am not sure the President is above all criticism. There are the person, the office and the personal opinions of the President. I have not read the speech so I will not go into it.

If we are to debate the 1916 Rising and its significance, we should not debate something which happened 90 years ago through the lens of today. At the same time, there was the Battle of the Somme and the extraordinarily romantic view of war which pervaded in Britain until Wilfred Owen and other war poets began to tell the truth about what war was like which led to the destruction of that romantic view. These events should perhaps influence how we judge 1916 as well. It was the beginnings of the realisation of what war was and the fact there is no romance about any war, however noble the cause for which it is fought. There are reflections which are worth making without making moral judgments.

On a few occasions over the past year or so I have raised the fact it is no longer possible to know in what country much of the clothing we buy is made. A very good campaign about who made the shirt on one's back is being run by an active group of people. I find it astonishing that we still do not know because in other EU countries, it is possible to find out. Marks and Spencer in Britain has announced a Fairtrade equivalent in the clothing area. Its problem is that it is very hard to get cotton which can be certified as being provided in a legitimate way.

The least we can do is ensure Irish consumers, many of whom are sensitive about this issue, are aware of where their clothes are made. I would say it is six months since I asked the Leader about this issue. I do not doubt her goodwill but somebody somewhere is not taking this issue as seriously as they should. It is an issue of concern to people. Fair trade in other areas is a significant part of the marketplace and it influences people's choice. If what they buy is cheap, people are entitled to know the reason is that it was produced via exploitation.

Speaking of exploitation, we need to have a major debate on partnership. A series of utterances from IBEC reported in today's newspapers suggest that Irish workers in Europe's most successful economy should accept below the rate of inflation wage increases. That suggests the grip on reality about which IBEC seems to talk has been lost by it. Those of us who will watch the extraordinary corporate indulgence on the margins of the Ryder Cup as the whole of corporate Ireland goes on a rampage of champagne drinking and high living will have great difficulties identifying—

(Interruptions).

**Mr. Ryan:** I have no problems with the ruling class in this country enjoying itself.

**Dr. Mansergh:** The Senator is part of it.

**Mr. Ryan:** I know——

**An Cathaoirleach:** I wonder about the relevance of this to the Order of Business.

**Mr. Ryan:** As has often been said here, I know what class I am in. The problem with Fianna Fáil is that it cannot make up its mind.

**A Senator:** It is a broadly based party. It representative of all.

**Mr. Ryan:** It is a bit rich to suggest that lifestyle should be sustained by the notion that ordinary working families should put up with a wage increase which is less than the rate of inflation. That is nonsense.

**Mr. Dardis:** I agree with Senator Brian Hayes and others in regard to a debate on the 1916 Rising, the Battle of the Somme and the other events of that time. It is important to reflect on these issues. For too long, we have excluded parts of our history. We must be mature enough to confront all aspects of history, including 1916, the First World War, the Second World War and the atrocities which have taken place since. It is important we confront those issues.

Senator Mansergh made a good point yesterday in regard to the proclamation as being a declaration of what a republic should be and a model which states could follow. In fact, it was a model for other countries. However, we must remember all those who died. What they had in common was sacrifice. By the lights of their own conscience, they made a sacrifice which must be recognised, whether in the GPO or on the battlefields of Flanders. We cannot ignore those matters. This House recognises the President is Head of State. She has our loyalty and our confidence, irrespective of what criticisms we might have of the utterances she might make.

Senator Ryan has descended into the realm of the absurd in making a conjunction between the events of the Ryder Cup and partnership. The Ryder Cup has one of the largest worldwide television audiences of any sporting event. It will have enormous benefits for this country. People in my part of the country close to the K Club, which is an exclusive place, and in many other parts of the country will benefit enormously from the Ryder Cup and the people who will come to see it.

**Ms O'Rourke:** They will not have any champagne.

**Mr. Finucane:** In January 2005, the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources said that much research was being done in the area of energy.

He stated that it would be the most profound work undertaken for years. As part of his research, he employed a consultancy group, Deloitte & Touche, who completed its findings prior to December. While there have been many leaks regarding the report's potential contents, no Members have seen the report itself.

I ask the Leader to invite the Minister before the House to discuss general energy matters. We have witnessed a liberalisation of the electricity market which has made no difference. Instead, in the past few years, electricity prices have skyrocketed. I understand the report has implications for the ESB's dominance in the market, in that it has recommended breaking up the ESB to open up the market place. In that context, I want the Minister to come before the House to outline the current status *vis-à-vis* the energy market.

**Mr. Mooney:** I endorse much of Senator Ryan's remarks in respect of the country of origin issue. Like me, he has received much correspondence from the main supporters of this campaign in Ireland, namely, Burma Action Ireland, which is to be commended for highlighting this matter. The issue is of course linked to the junta in Burma, or Myanmar, as the junta likes to call it. The Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Deputy Michael Ahern, who has responsibility for this area has corresponded with me on this issue. While there is no consensus within the European Union on the matter, there are signs that an initiative is underway to attempt to pull together the disparate forces within the EU that might agree on a country of origin label. It is incumbent on this House, and I welcome Senator Ryan's remarks in this respect, that the Leader of the House should make further inquiries. As this is an important issue for consumers, it might also warrant the Minister coming before the House to clarify the matter.

My main purpose in speaking this morning is to discuss the Shot at Dawn Campaign. I thank Senator Brian Hayes for his kind remarks with regard to my modest contribution in this area. He and I jointly questioned the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at the recent British-Irish Interparliamentary Body's plenary session in Edinburgh on the "shot at dawn" question. The Shot at Dawn Campaign in Ireland has been led by Peter Mulvaney, who has been extremely active in this regard. As a result of the initiative taken by Senator Brian Hayes and me in Edinburgh, Lord Dubbs, who is a member of the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body, raised it in the House of Commons. The view is that the activity on the Irish side has managed to put this issue back on centre stage. In order to maintain this momen-

[Mr. Mooney.]

tum, I ask the Leader of the House to allow time for statements, perhaps for one hour, at a time to be agreed between the Whips, so that we can join with our British colleagues in this respect.

After many years of failed attempts, the Government was given the files on the 27 Irish soldiers who were shot at dawn. All 27 files were forensically examined and it makes for appalling reading. While the files have not been published because the British Government will not allow it, they were leaked to the *Sunday Independent* in August. I recommend that all Members should read the article in question, which appeared in the issue published on the first Sunday in August and which makes for awful reading. There is a general view that the Government should publish the report and the Department of Foreign Affairs is happy to so do. While I am sorry for speaking at such length, it is important, in the context of the remarks made about reconciliation in the House this morning, that we have an early and urgent debate on this matter.

**Mr. Norris:** I welcome the remarks of Senators Brian Hayes and Mooney on the Shot at Dawn Campaign and congratulate them on raising it in the appropriate forum, namely the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body meeting. They have done some extremely important work. I must take an assertiveness course, because I raised this issue first. I raised it consistently over——

**Mr. B. Hayes:** My apologies.

**Mr. Norris:** It does not matter. The most important thing is to get something done about it. As I have noted previously in the House, the New Zealand Government really put this issue on the agenda. It not only exonerated its own troops but honoured them publically. These poor creatures were slaughtered for reasons like refusing to put on a wet filthy cap in the middle of a bombardment. It was a disgrace and a vile thing to happen.

This is cystic fibrosis week. It would be useful if this House discussed this issue for a number of reasons. I feel strongly about the matter because I have encountered a number of people with the condition. For example, I had an extremely remarkable, charming and intelligent student in Trinity College who greatly impressed me and who continued with her work despite her great difficulties. I have known a number of people with this tragic and awful disease and they are gentle, decent people. This country has the highest rate of cystic fibrosis anywhere, and one in 116,000 live births has this problem. While in the North of Ireland, the average life expectancy of someone with this condition is 34 years, in the Republic, it is 17 years. Why is this? Surely when we have this problem in our midst, we should direct our energies, resources and facilities towards it. We should conduct research and be

the world leader in this respect. I would welcome, perhaps in the context of a debate on health issues, the House pressing for such people to be given a decent opportunity of life. Many initiatives, such as the provision of isolation units could be taken. However, I will not anticipate the debate.

**Dr. Mansergh:** It is my understanding that in accordance with a Government decision, An Post will issue stamps to commemorate both the 90th anniversary of the Easter Rising and the 90th anniversary of the battle of the Somme.

At the Soloheadbeg commemoration last Sunday, as has been the practice for many years, relatives of at least one of the RIC constables who was shot dead were present. There is everything to be said for looking at our history in a spirit of mutual respect and reconciliation. However, that does not mean that I subscribe to efforts to effectively repudiate and criminalise parts of our history, such as the 1916 Rising and the War of Independence. I am afraid that some people's ambitions — one of whom was quoted in this House yesterday — stretch in that direction.

Finally, supporting a debate——

**Mr. Norris:** Name and shame. The Senator should provide Members with the name.

**Dr. Mansergh:** As a Senator of long standing, I would have thought that Senator Norris knows that it is not the practice of this House to so do.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Order, please.

**Mr. Norris:** This was a sly insinuation, as the Senator is perfectly aware.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Order.

**Dr. Mansergh:** I will conclude. While I would support a debate on the Shot at Dawn Campaign, one hour is unrealistically short, as I believe that many Members might wish to contribute and a more substantial debate would be required.

**Mr. Coghlan:** Senator Brian Hayes made some interesting points this morning, and did Members a great favour by staying up late last night to read the President's speech. I must confess that I had not read it. However, all Members accept, as Senator Dardis has noted, that however one might regard individual utterances, the President's comments were of course meant in that spirit of mutual respect. Regardless of how Members as individuals might judge 1916, as Senator O'Toole remarked, we are now sufficiently grown up and mature to be able to discuss and debate all of those matters. We do not need to exclude any aspect of our history. I support having a debate, if the Leader of the House can arrange it.

**Labhrás Ó Murchú:** To some extent, Members should feel pleased that 1916 is being discussed in these Houses. It is no longer a matter of “Who fears to speak of Easter week”. In many ways, we must be careful that in endeavouring to build bridges, we do not become apologetic for what we are. I have always supported the idea of commemorations because I never thought of them in terms of physical force. I thought of them in terms of patriotism, of selflessness and of heroism. I do not believe that the men and women of 1916 were in any sense “military”, as we understand the term. Having one parent who was English, many of my relatives fought with the British army but I am an Irishman and I would like to commemorate and celebrate those people who helped us to develop in the manner we have. The discussion on all aspects of the fight for freedom has never lacked balance.

There is a strong revisionist movement in Ireland and many of the revisionists have written books and articles and made programmes, which denigrated and misrepresented the patriots of the past. Recently, I was privileged to be a guest speaker at a meeting of the 1916-1921 Club at McKee Barracks. The club has commemorated that period through the years but I did not get a sense of them failing to acknowledge other countries that fought for their freedom and protected their independence.

My mother, for example, wore the poppy but I saw nothing wrong with that. There is, therefore, nothing wrong with people in Britain or America commemorating bravery and courage. I am worried that we are not mature enough to recognise those great people who gave leadership at a time it was necessary. If 1916 is to be commemorated, I would not like the commemoration to be confused. However, I agree with Senator Walsh's call yesterday. Why not have a long debate during which everybody's point of view can be heard and analysed? The House would do a great credit to the State if it gave leadership in that regard.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Members should not applaud in the House.

**Mr. Norris:** Could the Cathaoirleach explain what I just heard? Was it a cuckoo?

**Mr. Feighan:** I come from a proud republication tradition. My grandfather was a Sinn Féin councillor and he was also commander of the IRA in north Roscommon. However, we have had too much revision for too long. Young Irishmen who were not soldiers went abroad to fight against tyranny with a sense of adventure. They also travelled because their friends were going and they needed the money. Every Member should visit the grave of John Condon, who was sacrificed at Flanders at the age of 15 years. For too long, we have air-brushed the proud history of these young men.

**Mr. B. Hayes:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Feighan:** I agree with Senator Brian Hayes that a memorial should be provided. We should remember the men of 1916 in the same way as the men who fought in the Great War. I am a member of the Connacht Rangers Association. More than 130 men from my town, which had a population of 2,500, were killed in the Great War and they must be remembered but, for too long, successive Governments, for reasons I can never explain, air-brushed their histories. These young men left as heroes and they fought for a united Ireland. As a result of what happened in 1916, they had to hide for many years when they returned from the war. We should grow up, as should the British Government.

I agree with Senator Mooney's call for the pardon of the 27 Irish soldiers. The British Government has not acted impartially on this because many senior officers were pardoned through patronage. The precedent has been set and pressure must be put on the British Government to ensure those men are pardoned.

**Senators:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. J. Walsh:** I concur with Senator Ó Murchú's contribution. When I called for a day long debate on 1916 yesterday, I was not as precise as I should have been in the language I used. I had in mind a debate on the Easter Rising and all aspects associated with it. Many Members have commended the content of the proclamation, which was an outstandingly far-seeing document for its time. We enjoy the opportunity to debate the social and economic challenges and policies that we would like to pursue on behalf of our nation in the Oireachtas and that is attributable to those men who paid the supreme sacrifice during the Easter Rising. It should be debated in an open and healthy way on its 90th anniversary, without confusing with other events. We should not join the revisionist brigade by confusing issues.

**Mr. Norris:** What is wrong with revisionism?

**Mr. J. Walsh:** I support the call for a debate on the First and Second World Wars and the Irishmen who fought in them on another occasion.

I do not need to be told to visit the grave of John Condon because I have visited it. The first pair of boots a 14-year old from Waterford ever wore was when he joined the British army. That highlights the need for the Easter Rising and why those involved gave us the freedom we enjoy today.

**Mr. Quinn:** As an employer over the years, I was always greatly satisfied when immigrants integrated well into our society. However, a number of immigrants do not integrate very well. Yesterday, the question of who has responsibility

[Mr. Quinn.]

to help immigrants to integrate into our society cropped up at a meeting of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on European Affairs. It emerged that nobody has such responsibility. I am thinking of immigrants who arrive in Ireland to take up low paying jobs, usually cleaning and washing. They work only with people of their own nationality and they only speak their native language. When they finish work, they return to a ghetto-like apartment or home. They never learn English and they do not integrate. The State has a responsibility to help them integrate and somebody should have this function. It also emerged at yesterday's meeting that it is likely that 575,000 immigrants will move to Ireland over the next five years. On that basis, there is an onus on the State to help them integrate and somebody should take that responsibility. I seek a debate on this issue.

**Mr. Hanafin:** I support the call for a debate on the 1916 Rising. I come from a republican tradition and I have always understood that the Irishmen who participated in the First World War fought against German imperialism in Europe and those involved in the 1916 Rising fought against British imperialism in Ireland. My primary degree is in history and in the context of the Penguin book of history, we won both the home draw and the away draw. I am glad because the decent people won in both cases. It was better that Germany was defeated because it engaged in an imperialist act and it was also better that we secured our freedom because we have done so much with it and we can do much more.

Will the Leader ask the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources to come to the House to debate our energy policy? The House should examine the Government's strategy to develop our natural resources. The Centre for Public Inquiry recently issued an disingenuous report which stated oil exploration licences have not been granted. Since 1980 the average price of oil has been less than \$30 a barrel but the centre accused the Government of handing out licences when they could not be given away. A great deal of money has been invested and I would like a fair and rational debate on our energy policy.

Order of Business adjourned.

### Visit of Hungarian Delegation.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Before proceeding with the Order of Business, I would like to welcome a delegation from Hungary led by its Minister for Employment who have joined us in the Distinguished Visitors Gallery. They are most welcome and I hope they have an enjoyable and successful stay in Ireland.

### Order of Business (Resumed).

**Mr. P. Burke:** I would like to be associated with the welcome to the delegation from Hungary and wish them well in their stay.

I ask the Leader to raise on our behalf the issue of the Castlebar-Westport to Dublin railway line, which goes through Athlone in the Leader's constituency.

**An Cathaoirleach:** That may be a matter for the Adjournment.

**Mr. P. Burke:** I am seeking a debate on the matter.

**Mr. Norris:** Are you right there Michael, are you right?

**Mr. P. Burke:** It is a very serious issue because an advertisement on all the television stations recently has been referring to the fact that we are getting new carriages and so on. It ends with the words "some journey". On many occasions there is no dining car on the Westport to Dublin line, which means there is no wheelchair accessible carriage on the train. As a result, people in wheelchairs must remain in the passageway. It is not good enough in this day and age to have people in wheelchairs lining up in the corridors and passageways of trains. I ask the Leader to arrange for a debate on the issue because, as the advertisements states, it certainly is some journey for the unfortunate wheelchair users.

**Mr. Glynn:** I warmly welcome the prospect of a debate on 1916. I strongly identify with the sentiments expressed by Senator Ó Murchú and Senator Jim Walsh and I look forward to speaking during any such debate.

I support Senator Norris's remarks on cystic fibrosis, which is a terrible condition. I ask the Leader to arrange a debate on diabetes at the earliest opportunity, especially type 2 diabetes. At a recent meeting of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health and Children, we had people in from the Diabetes Federation of Ireland and other organisations and the statistics that were made available were absolutely frightening. It is a serious issue on which a debate is very important.

**Dr. M. Hayes:** I support Senator Quinn's request for a debate on the integration of immigrants in society, which is the most pressing social problem we face. We need incoming workers for the economy because they bring a great richness and diversity to our society. There appears to be no policy in this regard. We have an opportunity to avoid the situations that have arisen in France and Britain.

On Senator Norris's request for a debate on cystic fibrosis and the disparity of figures between here and Northern Ireland, this is a place close to home from which we can learn how to deal with this appalling illness. Sufferers comprise an

important group in society for whom great improvements could be made without enormous expense.

**Mr. Scanlon:** I concur with the sentiments expressed by Senator Paddy Burke. There is a similar problem on the Dublin-Sligo line. It is a fantastic line, due to the good work of our Leader when she was Minister for Transport and the money that was invested in the line at the time. The service on the Sligo line has increased from three to five a day, which is important for the west of Ireland. While some of the carriages being used on the line are old, they are more comfortable than the new carriages because they are commuter carriages which should be used on short journeys around the city. These carriages are not suitable for a three hour journey. There is no dining car on the train. One can get a cup of tea but the people serving the tea on the new trains cannot move the trolley from carriage to carriage because it is not safe. There is also a problem for people using wheelchairs. In order not to obstruct the rest of the passengers on the train, they must remain in the luggage area. It is not acceptable that people with disabilities should have to suffer this embarrassment.

**Senators:** Hear, hear.

**Ms O'Rourke:** While many Senators spoke about 1916, I noted Senator Jim Walsh's name because I intended to relay to the House a conversation I had with him about 1916. He elucidated it himself when he spoke. He and I had a brief but telling conversation about it and his ideas concur very much with his and Senator Ó Murchú's remarks on the matter.

Senator Brian Hayes read the President's speech. He noted that she spoke about those who died at the Battle of the Somme, and I am sure in other battles in the First World War, and suggested that we should have a debate on the matter. I concur with Senator Jim Walsh that we should have a day long debate on the issue where people would have an opportunity to make known their point of view. I echo Senator O'Toole's comment that it is time we all grew up in regard to these matters. As we approach Easter, we should have a structured and long debate on the matter. People will have different points of view, but we should have a whole-hearted debate. I hope we will discuss the matter at a CPP meeting. It could be a forum for differing points of view.

A strong debate is currently taking place in the letters column of a particular newspaper, which is very instructive. There is also a strong debate taking place via a particular columnist in the same newspaper.

**Mr. Ryan:** Not so instructive.

**Mr. Norris:** Not at all instructive.

**Ms O'Rourke:** I will not name the person in question. It would be good for us all to have that debate. I hope we recognise that the President has a much broader agenda than what was detailed in the column which suggested that she was entering into a narrow focused debate.

Senator Brian Hayes also referred to the Shot at Dawn Campaign. Over the Christmas period, there was a vivid documentary on this, which was so harrowing. Some of these people were very young, one being just 13 years of age. They were not asked for birth certificates. Whatever age one gave was accepted. These young people were expected to behave like men, even though many of them were just young teenagers. They were shot while others were let go.

Senator Mooney also raised this matter about which he spoke to me at length last night. There is no doubt the files should be released. The British probably want to keep alive the romanticism or heroism of these people. Everyone who fights in wars is a hero, even though they may come to it from different viewpoints. The British want to keep this sense of romanticism about the First World War. They are very good at commemorating their wars. We see the great pomp, decoration and medals each year and the way they keep these events alive. I hope we can pierce through that and have a good debate on the matter. I agree with Senator O'Toole that it is a process of maturation for us all and we should openly discuss the matter.

I would say to Senator Ryan that one cannot debate 1916 through the lens of today because it is a different time, a different place and there are different actors. There was a romantic view of war until the truth was made known. The poets who wrote so fetchingly of that period kept this view alive. Poetry anthologies and so on contain beautiful words, which I am sure were penned with a great sense of heroism.

The Senator referred to fair trade in clothes and the fact that we are not aware from where our clothes are coming. As the Senator said, there is a campaign which asks people if they know from their shirts come. We will endeavour to get the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment to come into the House to discuss this matter.

Senator Ryan also referred to the need for a partnership debate. A social partnership debate is scheduled for next Tuesday afternoon. The Chief Whip, and Minister of State, Deputy Tom Kitt, will take the debate and I hope a full congregation of Senators will be present.

The holding of the Ryder Cup was raised. I do not watch or play golf but people I know who do, and I do not believe they drink champagne, are looking forward to seeing it.

Senator Dardis referred to the sacrifice made during war and the 1916 Rising. The President, notwithstanding her personal views, would have all our loyalty and confidence. Lest this would have escaped in the milieu of yesterday, I wish to



[Ms O'Rourke.]

point out that from my point of view and that of my party, the President would have our confidence and loyalty and, I am sure, the confidence and loyalty of this House as a legislative Assembly. Senator Dardis also spoke of the Ryder Cup.

Senator Finucane again called for a debate on energy. Such a debate would be useful. I cannot remember our debating energy in this House previously, apart from our own energy or lack of it. We should have a debate on that matter. The Senator referred to Deloitte & Touche which seems to be involved in everything. Senator Dardis referred to leaks from its report which is not available. We will ask the Minister if he can attend a debate on energy.

Senator Mooney referred to the country of origin issue. He also referred to the Shot at Dawn Campaign, which he and Senator Brian Hayes raised with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Peter Hain, presumably when they attended the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body. He spoke of a newspaper article on soldiers shot at dawn which appeared in an issue published on the first Sunday in August. I cannot remember but Senator Norris said it was he who raised that issue in this House.

Senator Norris also raised the issue of cystic fibrosis and the disparity in the longevity of those who suffer from it here and in the North. That must be some reason for that.

Senator Mansergh is a member of a committee of An Post that deals with stamps. We will commemorate the Battle of the Somme and other battles as well as the 1916 Rising. The debate on that has already widened. We can thank the Members of the House under the aegis of the Cathaoirleach who allowed us to have a mini debate on that issue. Even in the past 24 hours we have all moved forward quite considerably in our views on such issues. That is a good move.

Senator Mansergh told us the Soloheadbeg commemoration will endeavour to have present the relatives of at least one of constables who was shot. He also called for a spirit of mutual respect regarding the President.

Senator Ó Murchú raised the commemoration of the 1916 Rising. He referred to the spirit of everyone who goes to fight and that they go from a sense of patriotism and selflessness, all aspects of Irish nationalism. He spoke of his experience at the 1916-1921 Club and of his dear mother who wore the poppy. He saw nothing unusual in that. They are reflections that give texture to a debate. They give a viewpoint on matters. I remember when I was young in Athlone a woman sold poppies each November. We did not know what that was about and nobody told us. It was interesting to hear what the Senator had to say about it.

Senator Feighan referred to 130 people from Boyle who went to fight in the First World War for the freedom of small nations, albeit that is

what we were told was the ideal for which they went to fight. When people were in the trenches I suppose small nations seemed far away,

Yesterday, Senator Jim Walsh called for a day-long debate on 1916 and I mulled over what he said last night. The proclamation was a very advanced social document for its time.

I fully agree with what Senator Quinn said about the integration of immigrants. We opened the borders, invited them in, sent out the message that we need them, love them and they could come here without much fuss. However, now that they are here, there is nobody whom they can contact. We do not want a nanny State but it would be helpful for them to have a referral point or person where they could get advice, know their rights and be looked after in general. This would be a good subject for a debate. Approximately 500,000 immigrants will come to live here over the next five years, which is a very significant figure compared with our population. This trend is proceeding in an *ad hoc* fashion.

Senator Hanafin spoke of the different types of imperialism which provoked the 1916 Rising and the First World War. He joined Deputy Finucane in calling for a debate on energy.

Senator Paddy Burke raised the Castlebar-Westport-Dublin railway line and, in particular, the lack of wheelchair accessibility on that line. Senator Glynn referred to the remarks on cystic fibrosis and called for a debate on the incidence of type 2 diabetes.

Senator Maurice Hayes called for a debate on integration, which is the issue facing immigrants we have welcomed here. We do not want them to be here as a specialist group but to be integrated. Such a debate would be useful. The Senator also referred to the disparity in longevity of sufferers of cystic fibrosis North and South.

Senator Scanlon referred to the Dublin to Sligo railway line. He mentioned the difference between the old carriages which everybody despised and the new carriages which are not quite everybody's dream, as they do not allow for free passage of the tea trolley or access for people with disabilities. I take on board the Senator's point and we will endeavour to work that matter into a debate on transport.

Order of Business agreed to.

**Companies (Auditing and Accounting) Act 2003  
(Prescribed Accountancy Bodies) Regulations  
2006: Motion.**

**Mrs. O'Rourke:** I move:

That Seanad Éireann approves the following regulations in draft:

Companies (Auditing and Accounting) Act 2003 (Prescribed Accountancy Bodies) Regulations 2006,

copies of which have been laid in draft form before Seanad Éireann on 24 January 2006.

Question put and agreed to.

### **Northern Ireland Issues: Statements.**

**An Cathaoirleach:** I welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Dermot Ahern. He is a busy man and I apologise for delaying him.

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern):** That is no problem. The Cathaoirleach is also a busy man. I am delighted to have this opportunity to address the Seanad which has always been such a consistent source of encouragement and support for the Government's efforts in the peace process.

As Senators are aware, I was in London yesterday to co-chair a meeting of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference with the Secretary of State, Peter Hain. I was accompanied at the meeting by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Deputy Michael McDowell.

The British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference is an important institution of the Good Friday Agreement. It is one of the ways in which the two Governments co-operate bilaterally to great effect and it particularly recognises the Irish Government's special interest in Northern Ireland and the extent to which mutual issues arise in that regard. We had very useful discussions on a range of important issues, including policing, security issues and North-South economic co-operation. I will brief Senators in more detail on our discussions, particularly on the latter issue, later in my statement. It is timely that Northern Ireland is on the agenda today. We are at a critical moment in the peace process where politics must reassert its primacy as paramilitary activity ends.

The Eighth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission, which was published by the British and Irish Governments yesterday, clearly signals that the time is ripe for politics to come to the fore again. I acknowledge once more the valuable work of the commission. Yesterday's report gives us the first comprehensive assessment of the IRA since its statement of 28 July last. It outlines that significant progress has been made in the switching-off of the IRA's paramilitary machine, the ending of paramilitary activity and the directing of the membership of the IRA towards exclusively political engagement. The report indicates that there have been no shootings, no assaults, no so-called "punishment attacks" or other authorised paramilitary attacks, no sanctioned robberies, no evidence of recruitment for paramilitary purposes and no evidence of paramilitary training on the part of the IRA since last July's statement.

When documents of this nature are published, people sometimes hone in on their negative aspects, which is unfortunate. Some people have

lost sight, to a certain extent, of the fact that the IMC report is peppered with statements of confirmation of the positivity that is a feature of the political and physical landscape of Northern Ireland. The report contains some genuinely positive indications regarding the IRA's strategic intent. In particular, it states that "the present PIRA leadership has taken the strategic decision to end the armed campaign and pursue the political course which it has publicly articulated". However, the IMC has also highlighted some indications of continued criminality on the part of current or former IRA members. We cannot ignore reports of intelligence-gathering that is illegal or outside the bounds of conventional political activity.

I wish to state clearly, as I did at yesterday's press conference, that we take such findings very seriously. It is essential that they should be addressed and resolved by the leadership of the Provisional IRA. The IMC report acknowledges that a great deal has been achieved, but continued efforts are required if the restoration of the institutions in Northern Ireland, which is vital, is to take place. The law enforcement agencies in both jurisdictions will continue to pursue vigorously the elements of paramilitary organisations which are continuing to engage in criminality. The ongoing work of the Criminal Assets Bureau and the Assets Recovery Agency is clear testimony of that. The IMC's comprehensive report should be read and assessed in a comprehensive manner, taking into account its findings as a whole.

The two Governments have also published a report compiled by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, the IICD, to which the Governments have given responsibility for overseeing the decommissioning of weapons. The dedication, commitment, professionalism and authority of the IICD are beyond question. The IICD's report, which was published yesterday, focuses on the main loyalist paramilitary groups. It notes that some progress has been made in respect of contacts but, regrettably, there has been no actual product in terms of the decommissioning of arms. The IICD also referred to reports of the retention of arms by some individuals and groups within the IRA. Having investigated such reports, the IICD concluded that its previous assessment — that the IRA decommissioned the totality of its arms last September — remains correct. We were surprised by the initial news reports yesterday.

**Ms O'Rourke:** Yes.

**Mr. D. Ahern:** Some of the media reported, on foot of the selective leaking of the IMC report and other issues, that the IICD had acknowledged that the IRA has retained some weapons, but the exact opposite is in fact the case. We were somewhat bemused and disappointed when we heard, when we were in London, that had hap-

[Mr. D. Ahern.]

pened. I wish to emphasise that the IMC and IICD reports have confirmed, contrary to the negative reports in some quarters, that a strategic decision to pursue politics via peaceful means has been taken by the IRA leadership. That such a decision was taken is not in question.

The IMC and IICD reports make a persuasive case for politics. Anyone who thinks the transition to politics is easy is naive. The process in which we are engaged is particularly demanding on people like my party colleagues, who have always pursued their political aims through politics and who have abhorred violence from any source. As a republican, I share their abhorrence of violence and their belief in peaceful politics. The transition to politics presents many challenges to the collective political leadership on these islands. The two sovereign Governments and the political parties in Northern Ireland need to reassert the primacy of politics after a long period of political deep-freeze. All of us are challenged with assuming our responsibilities and beginning to engage seriously with each other on the small number of outstanding issues which still require resolution. The transition I have mentioned challenges the IRA leadership to ensure that the absence of IRA paramilitary activity that has been identified by the IMC is sustained and that the outstanding concerns about criminality and intelligence-gathering are tackled and resolved.

We tend to underestimate the serious threat of the various loyalist paramilitary groups because we concentrate on the other side to a certain extent. The leaders of those groups are being challenged to follow the path that has clearly been taken by the IRA. The Governments have reiterated that they will respond positively to those who are making genuine efforts to achieve transformation within loyalism. As we move towards devolved Government, we are determined that the process will leave nobody behind. Loyalist paramilitaries must cease the shootings, assaults and other paramilitary activity, engage fully with the IICD, take the necessary steps to decommission their weapons and press ahead with the current transformation initiatives.

Each of us must meet the various challenges I have outlined if we are to succeed in delivering on the commitment we have made to the people of this island to restore the devolved institutions at the earliest possible date. We have come a long way in recent years on the basis of sustained political engagement to resolve political issues, combined with effective law enforcement to tackle paramilitary and criminal activity by loyalist and republican groups. As someone who was born and bred in the Border area and continues to live there, I am familiar with the physical sea change that has taken place in the region, particularly on the northern side of the Border, where many security towers have been removed. I have noticed that a general sense of ease now exists in

the region to a much greater extent than it did in previous years. The difference is incredible — long may it last. The Governments will continue their efforts to ensure that such progress is sustained.

I issued a statement at the beginning of this year, saying that the Governments would embark on a concerted effort to re-establish the Northern Ireland Assembly and the institutions in 2006. I said that local devolved government was the clear will of the people of Northern Ireland and that the political parties and those of us in government had a duty to deliver on that. I reiterate that message today. It is clear that attention must focus on the restoration of the political institutions. As the Taoiseach and the UK Prime Minister, Mr. Blair, said after their meeting at Farnleigh last week, 2006 is the decisive year for the peace process. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr. Peter Hain, and I will begin talks next Monday with the aim of setting out the arrangements and timetable for the restoration of the institutions as soon as possible. We recognise that we are setting an ambitious goal, but we are conscious of our responsibilities as Governments and we are fully prepared to exercise them.

The task of building confidence and restoring normal politics demands effort, support and a willingness to take risks by all parties. It demands that the commitment to pursue politics exclusively through peaceful and lawful means is fully adhered to and that all parties engage actively and collectively in efforts to restore the institutions needed to secure long-term peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland. We appreciate that it will be difficult to operate the Assembly, the Executive and the North-South bodies on anything other than a care and maintenance basis in the near future and we understand that people will not rush into an Executive. The next couple of months are critical when one considers the challenges I have mentioned, particularly those to be faced by the Provisional IRA as it comes to terms with the issues raised in the IMC report. The next few months are also important for the political parties as they will have to decide whether they are willing to engage with this process in a constructive manner.

Since the Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998, significant progress has been made and continues to be made in Northern Ireland. While there have been positive aspects to that progress, such as unprecedented peace, prosperity and growth, some significant economic and social challenges remain. It is clear that the suspension of the devolved institutions is hampering the ability of Northern Ireland to tackle such challenges. There is no substitute for locally-elected politicians working in a partnership government for the benefit for the people they represent. A classic example is the way in which the Taoiseach led a delegation to India recently and included in it companies and business people from Northern

Ireland. That is something Northern Ireland should be doing in its own right with its own elected politicians dictating for themselves and working with the South in that respect.

The simple fact is that Northern Ireland cannot afford complacency or prolonged stalemate. It cannot thrive, socially or economically in a political vacuum. We want to see positive politics and the restoration of the devolved institutions in 2006 and we will spare no effort to bring that about.

In 2005, despite what by any standards was a very bad start, we made real progress. The unprecedented commitment by the IRA last July to end its armed campaign and the confirmation by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning in September that the IRA had put all its weapons beyond use were welcome and historic, if overdue, developments. They changed the context within which the Governments had been working to restore confidence and trust in a political process which had been hampered by a series of events over a number of years. They gave us a basis on which we could re-engage with the parties to restore and fortify that trust and confidence and to rebuild political momentum.

We had a busy autumn and winter working with the parties. The Taoiseach, Tony Blair, Peter Hain and I met on several occasions to consider the way forward. Mr. Hain and I made ourselves jointly available for a series of stocktaking talks with parties on 14 and 24 November 2005 at Hillsborough. Those meetings complemented the many bilateral meetings with all of the parties which both Governments had in November and December.

During the course of those meetings, and through our regular contact with them, we have listened carefully to what the parties have said to us on the way forward. We recognise that there are differences of view as to how and when restoration of the institutions can be achieved. We also recognise that the climate of trust and confidence between some of the parties is not currently what we would all wish.

However, we are clear in our determination to build on the progress made in Northern Ireland over three long and difficult decades and particularly in the years since the Good Friday Agreement, to work with the parties to restore Government to the people of Northern Ireland. The current overall security situation on the ground is testimony to how far we have come in that time. As of last month, troop numbers are at their lowest level in 30 years and will go lower. Watchtowers and observation posts have been taken down in south Armagh, Derry and Belfast and more are to follow. In Forkhill and Newtownhamilton, military installations that have dominated the centre of the towns for years are being dismantled. The British navy gunboat in Carlingford Lough, which had been a source of much complaint for many years by my constituents and those in the general area, is also gone. This pro-

cess of demilitarisation and normalisation is ongoing and scheduled to be completed by 1 August 2007. Speaking with Peter Hain and his officials yesterday they desire that to continue in an ever increasing way.

The welcome fact is that the people of Northern Ireland are living in a much more benign and safer environment, less overshadowed by violence and by the threat of it, and the tangible outcome is that many communities are moving swiftly away from militarised abnormality towards peaceful normality. All in all, these are positive developments and we should never underestimate them.

There are other significant challenges ahead. Support for policing is critical to ensuring an inclusive democracy in Northern Ireland in which all sections of society feel secure. Furthermore, a normal society requires a normal police service, operating with the support of all political parties and with the active co-operation of the local community which it serves. In moving about in Northern Ireland I am adamant that the ordinary people, particularly in Nationalist areas, wish the policing issue to be dealt with once and for all. Enormous progress has been made in implementing the Patten reforms and there is genuinely, in our view, no obstacle to full endorsement and engagement with the PSNI. There is also a widespread demand on the ground in Nationalist areas for proper, effective, accountable policing. Given where I live I can see that in places such as south Down and south Armagh.

Therefore, for the benefit of the communities it represents, and for the benefit of the wider political process, it is time for Sinn Féin to endorse the new policing arrangements, —

**Mr. B. Hayes:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. D. Ahern:** —to co-operate with the police service, and to take its place on the accountability mechanisms set up on foot of the Patten report, namely, the policing board and district policing partnerships.

It is also the case that the Unionist parties, and particularly the DUP, have to accept when Sinn Féin makes that move that they will be part of those policing arrangements. In the comprehensive agreement of December 2004 it was clear that the one issue on which the DUP and Sinn Féin could agree was not to move forward on the issue of policing — for Sinn Féin because it was too big a step at that particular time but also the DUP did not want what are termed the “Shiners” having anything to do with policing. One way or the other, if these parties are to go into an effective Executive and all that entails, it cannot happen that either of them would not commit to the agreed structures whereby policing can be moved forward and that the executive government can have adherence and support for the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

[Mr. D. Ahern.]

Political engagement and proper accountable law enforcement are key to a stable society. What about the stability of the economy? The political stability and economic prosperity of this island are intrinsically linked. That is the case more than ever. While we work with the parties towards restoration of the institutions, we are forging ahead with North-South economic co-operation. I have consistently made this a priority in my discussions with the Secretary of State. I cite many times the report carried out in the Republic, "Ahead of the Curve: Ireland's Place in the Global Economy" headed up by Eoin O'Driscoll, which shows clearly that the presence of stable and accessible Government in Ireland in recent decades has been one of the key reasons for our economic climate. Investors can see clearly that we have a politically stable situation here. The same cannot be said about Northern Ireland where, in effect, all the political parties have been in opposition for the past 40 or so years. It is one of the important reasons the parties in Northern Ireland should engage and get their hand on the tiller of power in order that they can make not only the nice decisions we are able to make these days in governing this part of the island, but also take the tough decisions that previous Governments had to make in the Republic.

Yesterday, in London at the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, we discussed how we can give practical expression to our agreed aim of developing an all-island economy. We announced that we will undertake a comprehensive study to identify areas where future economic co-operation would deliver mutual benefits. As one who lives in the Border area I can remember the bombs that blew up the electricity inter-connector, which drove the two parts of this island further apart, the rail connection maiming and in some instances killing people, pushing those of us on this side of the Border further apart from colleagues in the North. The whole aspect of North-South co-operation is vital.

We have agreed to undertake a comprehensive study to see in what further areas we can co-operate with each other. This study will draw on the joint contribution we have already prepared under the revised Lisbon strategy. It will examine ways of developing economic co-operation in a strategic way so that we can build up the elements of an all-island economy. It will look at areas such as skills, research and development and innovation, competitiveness, trade promotion and investment. It makes no sense in this day and age of the global world that a small island of 5.5 million people, which is extremely productive, particularly in the Republic, should operate as two separate economies. There is enormous potential for this island. Only last month the Taoiseach invited Northern businessmen to participate in a trade delegation he led to India. The mission was highly successful and we are now

looking for further opportunities to work with the North on trade promotion to our mutual benefit.

A world class and joined-up infrastructure will be an important element of a competitive all-island economy. We had a good discussion yesterday on all-island co-operation on infrastructural development and spatial planning. Where I live I find it incredible that the cross-Border motorway is being continued from Ballymascanlon into the heart of Newry. This project is funded by taxpayers on both sides of the Border. It is the first major infrastructural project that has been carried out under this process. It is probably the harbinger for future similar major infrastructural developments. Both Governments are conscious that infrastructural investment on the island over the next ten years will be in the order of €100 billion. This represents an enormous opportunity for us to work together to get maximum return on our investment. For example, we are already working closely with the authorities in the North to make sure that the investment that we are making under the Transport 21 plan into key cross-Border routes is linked into what is happening on the other side of the Border.

North-South co-operation is a vital pillar of the Good Friday Agreement. It brings balance to the political settlement that the Agreement represents. We should not forget that the North-South dimension was a key priority for the Government in the negotiations on the Good Friday Agreement, given that in endorsing the Agreement, we removed Articles 2 and 3 from our Constitution in exchange for progress on the North-South dimension.

When it was up and running, the North-South Ministerial Council saw Ministers from both parts of the island, representative of both traditions, taking decisions together on a regular basis for the benefit of the people of the island. I was honoured to be part of that process. We made decisions that affected ordinary people on bread and butter issues with which nobody could query. Ministers from both parts of the island made outstanding efforts in the operation of the North-South structures. While we came to those meetings from different political cultures and traditions, we had a common commitment to advance co-operation to the mutual benefit of our people. I am determined, notwithstanding the continued suspension of the institutions of the Agreement, to sustain that co-operation, which has brought us so far, and which makes so much sense.

Next Monday, when Peter Hain and I sit down in Hillsborough for a full day of talks with the parties, we will clearly set out our intentions for the process. We have mapped out dates in our diaries for a number of other meetings in the not too distant future. I accept that progress may not be immediate, but we are determined to try and build the confidence needed to move politics forward. At all stages in negotiations — in Northern Ireland or anywhere else — periods of progress

tend to alternate with stalemate, optimism with pessimism. It is the job of the two sovereign Governments to take the rough with the smooth and to lead the process forward. Starting at the talks next week, the Governments will work to convince all sides of their political responsibility, as leaders of society, to finally complete the journey to our shared goal of a fully inclusive, stable and peaceful Northern Ireland.

**Mr. B. Hayes:** I thank the Leader of the House for organising this debate. She had received requests from many colleagues on all sides in recent months. I appreciate that she has provided time today for the debate.

I warmly welcome to the House the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Dermot Ahern, and thank him for a comprehensive statement in terms of all the current issues that are before him and the British and Irish Governments concerning this process. I also congratulate him on the difficult task he has in steering this process with the British Government to its final conclusion, which we all hope will be the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. He is someone who has noted progress in this area with keen interest over many years, not just because of where he lives but because of his interest in reconciliation. He is the right person for the job. I congratulate him on his work to date, as I do the Taoiseach, the Government, and their officials for what is a painstaking task.

As the Minister said, yesterday we received a copy of the published report of the Independent Monitoring Commission. While it is quite encouraging in terms of the fact that the vast majority of evidence found would back up that of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning and last September or October's report from General de Chastelain, there are some worrying signs which must be resolved by the Provisional movement before we see a full restoration of the Agreement.

The Minister referred to intelligence, which is one of the most disturbing outstanding issues. I still believe that within the Provisional movement there is low level intelligence gathering. I refer the Minister to the Special Criminal Court case of last year when known Sinn Féin activists were convicted in that court in connection with information they had gathered against Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas. I believe that information is being used for fighting political campaigns, to try to discredit opponents and to target certain politicians. I take this opportunity to remind the Provisional movement that this is unacceptable and it must stop. Such behaviour is inherently undemocratic and, as long as it continues, Sinn Féin cannot be regarded as a normal political party.

Yesterday, we also saw results of the investigations currently ongoing by the Criminal Assets Bureau into the substantial property portfolio that has been amassed by the Provisional move-

ment as a result of cleaning up its dirty money over a generation. I take this opportunity to congratulate the CAB on its work to date with the Assets Recovery Agency in Northern Ireland. I do not disconnect that criminality or illegality from the mainstream activities of Sinn Féin. This issue must be resolved. It must come before the courts. Assets must be stripped from that movement where those brought before the courts are found guilty of an offence.

The question of informers also came to the fore in recent months, in regard to Sinn Féin. We now know that a senior Sinn Féin politician, Mr. Donaldson, was part and parcel of the British security intelligence operation for the past 25 years. Who else is compromised and what other senior figures within the Republican movement are British informers? I had to laugh recently when I heard a senior Sinn Féin Deputy in the other House issue a statement to the effect that he was not a Garda informer. He would have gone up in my estimation, immeasurably, had it come to public light that he was a Garda informer and he had given information to the authorities here to try to stop atrocities that have occurred over the past 25 years. I understand that on his local radio station recently, the Minister was questioned if we want British agents as part of the Government of this Republic. This whole area is so murky and intertwined that I believe there are other senior republican figures whose position is entirely compromised as a result of the revelations about Mr. Donaldson in recent months. Sinn Féin must make that known.

It is a matter for the parties in Northern Ireland whether they want this Agreement to work. The British and Irish Governments can persuade them, cajole them, exert pressure and so on but ultimately, it is a matter for the parties in Northern Ireland, principally the two biggest parties, Sinn Féin and the DUP, to decide. I agree with the Minister that this year is the important one in terms of that happening. The reality is that Prime Minister Blair will be handing over his responsibilities as party leader to another Labour politician over the course of the next year or two and we go into an election next year. If the parties in Northern Ireland want to make this Agreement work, this is the year to do it. I would encourage them to make progress and to bring about the full implementation of the Agreement.

The DUP has given the British Government a document that has yet to be made public but of which I suspect the Irish Government has a good understanding. I have not seen the document but it argues for a phased re-establishment of the assembly, which would do day-to-day work for a period of time and hopefully lead to the full implementation of the Agreement. I understand this is also the Ulster Unionist Party's position. It wants the assembly up and running, even though the government is not yet in place.

12 o'clock

[Mr. B. Hayes.]

I will not prejudge the outcome of the current phase of talks but if this is the outcome, it is important for the Government to tie in a firm guarantee that, if the assembly is re-established without an executive in place, there would be a specific timeframe for the executive to be established. It would not be in the interests of the process to have an open ended, non-time specific process whereby the assembly could be re-established without an absolute guarantee that the full institutions in the Agreement are worked and up and running within a dedicated period of time. I am going into areas that I suspect the Government will discuss with all of the parties over the coming weeks and months but, if this is the outcome, we must have a specific timeframe. Constitutional nationalism will not buy a non-time specific re-establishment of the assembly.

It is important that we recognise that mistakes were made in the past. They were not deliberate but made as part of the process. One mistake, the current power play of the DUP and Sinn Féin, means that they are at the centre of the process to the exclusion of everyone else, such as the Ulster Unionist Party, the Alliance Party and the SDLP. We must return to the multiparty agenda and atmosphere present in 1998. Far too much is made of the significance of the DUP and Sinn Féin, their trading of concessions off each other and the Governments' pandering to them.

A point made by the leader of the SDLP, Mr. Mark Durkan, MP, was that we must work out the concessions made on the comprehensive agreement, one of which I will shortly refer to. One of the principles behind the Agreement is that of reconciliation. It was important that the First Minister and Deputy First Minister not only have a majority of the assembly behind them as a resolution but also a majority of the other community. This aspect was negotiated as part of a comprehensive agreement. If that comprehensive agreement comes to pass again in terms of this area, it will mean that the DUP and the majority of Unionism need not vote for Sinn Féin and *vice versa*. Will the Government examine this issue again? One of the key ideas behind reconciliation in the Agreement was that both communities needed to give support to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister candidates of the other community. I support the SDLP's position on this matter and ask the Government to return to its position prior to the December 2004 talks.

My party has held very different views to those of the Government on the McCabe issue. I welcome that it has since changed its position. The matter will remain off the table and Sinn Féin will not be allowed to put it back. I recently spoke to a member of the DUP and was informed that, when the assembly and executive were up and running, there were effectively 11 different governments.

**Dr. M. Hayes:** Yes.

**Mr. B. Hayes:** Each Minister decided issues within that Department without ultimate recourse to the Cabinet. That is not a functioning democracy. If we are to make progress in the talks, this issue must be revisited. I know it will be difficult but it is important that Ministers serving around the Cabinet table have a sense of collective belonging.

Last Saturday, I was privileged to take up the invitation of the Ulster Unionist Party to address a party gathering in the Le Mons Hotel, which is just outside Belfast, as the Minister knows. Senator Maurice Hayes knows more than I, as I was only eight years of age when it happened, that the Le Mons bombing was the scene of one of the North's worst atrocities. By way of a fire-bomb, 12 innocent civilians were murdered by the IRA in 1978.

From my discussion with the gathering, people from outside Northern Ireland — London, England, Scotland and Wales — sometimes have an inability to understand the level of bitterness still there concerning the Troubles. Our history is that we are 80 years from a violent, bloody and awful Civil War that wrecked homes and families and destroyed the early momentum of the foundation of this State. It has taken us 60 years, as it were, to get over that Civil War. We should not underestimate existing feelings in Northern Ireland on the Troubles and the enduring bitterness which is the result of that campaign.

With other colleagues, I recently attended the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body meeting in Edinburgh and was struck by a presentation made by Professor Paul Bew. He stated that, whatever one could say about the lack of progress in the North, one of the enduring parts of progress seen in recent years has been the new attitude of the Unionist community to the Republic and *vice versa*. He stated that it should not be underestimated. While I come from another political party, the person responsible for that change more than anyone else is the Taoiseach. He has no political or historical baggage in his dealings with Northern Ireland. I sincerely believe that he should take credit for the changed attitudes of the majority of the Unionist community and the political establishment of the Republic of Ireland. I want to recognise his work.

From my discussions of late with the DUP and the Official Unionist Party, it is also the case that the North-South matter is not so much an issue as an irritant. They did not want it in the talks. The Council of Ireland brought down the Sunningdale Agreement? In the North, there is no great hostility towards the question of North-South arrangements, the joint ministerial council or the initiatives referred to by the Minister in his speech. There has been a sea change in attitude, largely as a result of the Taoiseach's handling of this issue.

I recently had a chance to visit Belfast with other colleagues as part of the Co-operation Ireland initiative. I wish to put on record my

thanks for the many small steps taking place in the North by groups such as Co-operation Ireland and others that are trying to bring about reconciliation between the communities. I will end on a positive note, in that one of the best news stories we have recently heard is of the possibility that the British monarch and Head of State, Queen Elizabeth II, may shortly make the first state visit to this State since before our independence. I hope it happens, irrespective of whether we have an agreement in Northern Ireland, as it will show the new dispensation and relationship between Britain and Ireland, a relationship built on mutual trust and friendship that has matured so much since the early 1970s. That visit will be the most public manifestation yet that the relationship between our islands has changed.

**Ms O'Rourke:** I welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs to the Chamber. Many Senators had requested this debate and at a chance meeting in Government Buildings the Minister immediately agreed. There was no pomp or ceremony in arranging this debate for which I thank him. This House endeavours to keep up to date on Northern Ireland matters. This Chamber was founded on the premise of keeping Northern Ireland part of its business. Previous Senators were evidence of that.

Confusion existed following media reports of the IMC report. I watched various news reports, including RTE and BBC bulletins, that differed in interpretation of the report. As a Senator, one feels one should know everything but we rely on the media for reports from London and Northern Ireland. Reports of the outcomes of various investigations were quite confusing and I am pleased the Minister has clarified this.

The IMC report indicates continued criminality on the part of individuals who are current or former IRA members. We wanted to hear that comprehensive decommissioning had taken place and that both bodies, the IMC and the IICD, could confirm that. This did not emerge in media reports and today some elements of the print media are still confusing the issue. There is considerable interest in this matter and many people will be confused by conflicting reports.

We should record our appreciation of General John de Chastelain and the IMC and the IICD for the work done and offering opinions readily. I back the soldier in many ways and I think General de Chastelain's reports are always level, scholarly and soldierly. Whichever media outlet ran with the first leak got the headlines.

The Minister believes 2006 will be a decisive year and I agree with him. Like King Canute there is only so much one can do to keep the tide back. It often appears that pessimism and hope, stalemate and progress are mixed. I wonder how the faces can smile and the refuge of good work can be sought, emphasised and presented as evidence of what has happened and will happen. High intellect is required, along with the eternal

font of optimism, to ensure valuable work is highlighted as an example of progress. We need reassurance that the Good Friday Agreement is making progress, even if this occurs with varying intensity and some ups and downs. The political manoeuvring must be managed on a day to day basis and it is in this field that difficulties arise.

I was struck by the dismantling of military and technical equipment, which is taking place at a greater rate than we would have expected. These military establishments caused great angst to people and the dismantling is a positive step that can be presented as evidence of progress.

Resolution of the policing question is the single most important aspiration we have. I was impressed by the Patten report and the speedy implementation of its main proposals. I am friendly with Ms Kathy O'Toole, a former member of the Patten commission, who is now police chief in Boston. She is from Athlone but comes home regularly and often speaks of meetings in draughty school halls in Northern Ireland and how the commission came to its conclusions.

These recommendations have been implemented except for one pivotal measure that has not happened. We appeal to Sinn Féin and the DUP to take its place on the policing board. This would be appreciated by the people they represent. I do not understand why these two parties have such objections but clearly they have deep distrust of the PSNI and what it will do. "Jaw jaw" is better than "war war" and I encourage them to be part of the solution and recommendations of this board. It remains a major step for these parties and one they must be pondering deeply. Nevertheless, this step must be taken because the Patten recommendations are essential to what must take place in Northern Ireland. Sinn Féin and DUP membership of the policing body would be significant.

The report states that no shootings, assaults, so-called punishment attacks or authorised paramilitary attacks, recruitment or sanctioned robberies have taken place. The term "sanctioned robberies" is amazing as robberies should not take place, nor should they be sanctioned. While criminality still exists, we have moved to another plane. One year ago we would not have had a debate that focused on criminality but now it is what remains of the campaign. Intelligence gathering is outside the bounds of conventional political activity but a great deal has been achieved even though continued effort is required.

I thank Senator Brian Hayes for his generous remarks on the Taoiseach, which I endorse. This Chamber is not known for its heated debates, beyond those on the Order of Business. The Senator acknowledges the Taoiseach's calm presence and lack of baggage, to phrase the Senator's comments in modern jargon. This has been remarkably helpful as the Taoiseach can meet several different groups, all of whom find him approachable, and all have a sense of being dealt



[Ms O'Rourke.]

with intelligently and calmly. This is a difficult role to play in a country such as ours.

Economic activity will be the clear, shining light of persuasion. The entire island is quite small, particularly in European terms. It makes sense that all people work together, irrespective of the party one belongs to. Historically, we have done so but people tend to forget that. Up until the Act of Union there was a single country, operating satisfactorily and cogently in a commercial and industrial sense. Workers, industrialists and union members should know that it benefits all of us to work together as an island. A population of 5.5 million is small by any standard without placing a physical barrier where those on both sides seek different goals. The plain common sense of having one goal is an economic necessity and was evidenced by the Taoiseach's trip to India. There was no major brouhaha regarding what firms went, who went from them and what was their expertise. It was handled delicately and correctly, in that we knew it was happening but it was not pointed out and there were no loud hurrahs about it. I noted at cumann meetings and at other times many people commented it was good that industrialists from North and South went to India together. People were glad it happened and one hopes the industrialists they met decided that Ireland is a country to do business with on the basis that the people have come together in a coherent body.

I understand the Minister and his official stated the report by the DUP mentioned by Senator Brian Hayes is available on the Internet. That report is of interest. An outcome will not be reached unless everyone participates. The word "inclusive" is ill-used and over-used, but it is correct to use it regarding a final political solution. Unless everyone is in this together it will not happen.

Senator Brian Hayes discussed the importance of the players in the wider political spectrum moving along the same track. Parties such as the Alliance Party and the SDLP are important players. Debate tends to home in on the two main protagonists, Sinn Féin and the DUP because they were the main vote-getters in the last election, and much flows from that. Many other *dramatis personae* come and go with greater and lesser impact on the matters of the day. The point made was that whatever progress is made politically between the two main protagonists, the lesser players in terms of vote-getters must be brought along to be part of an overall settlement.

Life is not all fairy stories and "uair amháin fadó fadó". It used to be all fadó fadó but now we live in the present. We can see clearly that the heady optimism of the Good Friday Agreement was necessary at that point. It propelled wider political movement immediately. We would never have managed all we did without it. We keep clinging to that agreement and we needed it to propel us. We now need the continued slog of

which the Minister spoke, and it is slog to travel up and down for political talks, pointing out progress made and hoped for progress, while at the same time keeping watch on the wider political implications and the progress of the IMC and the IICD and also keeping economic activity to the fore. All of that involves sheer hard application and work, often without dramatic tales to tell. A debate such as this in which we can mark progress, examine all that has happened and look to the future and the continuation of the persuasion talks for the good of all of the island.

**Mr. Ross:** With the permission of the House I wish to share my time with Senators Norris and Quinn.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** Is that agreed? Agreed.

**Mr. Ross:** I was struck by the speech made by Senator Ó Murchú on the Order of Business. I was one of those who broke the rules of the House by applauding what he stated because I identified strongly with it. Perhaps the House finds that difficult to understand. His statement that his mother wore a poppy resonates with me. My parents also wore poppies when I was brought up. Perhaps they even sold them. They wear them to this day. When I entered this House in the 1980s, I suppose the views I expressed at the time were a product of that background to which Senator Ó Murchú referred. At that time I felt an outsider in the House and that those views were rejected and alien to the prevalent culture at the time. Indeed they were rejected and considered to be rather eccentric.

The Leader of the House is absolutely correct in her statements that this country's attitudes to Northern Ireland have moved on in the most encouraging way. The Leader stated that the Taoiseach's great flexibility and the fact that he does not carry any baggage are assets. I endorse that view. We can sit back and criticise the Taoiseach for many things. However, on the issue of Northern Ireland he has a permanent place in the history of Ireland. The reality is that whatever the setbacks, the situation improves by the day and the great tolerance the relative sides have of each other has improved immensely.

I am full of admiration for the outspokenness of Senator Brian Hayes on this issue on a consistent basis. There is little electoral advantage for many people here to speak out on Northern Ireland on whatever side. There is certainly no electoral advantage in taking the position which Senator Hayes has taken over a long period. It is courageous and the House should salute it. It is the stuff of leadership.

Having stated that, I wish to make some comments on the current situation in the five minutes available to me. It is all very well to be euphoric about the progress made, and we see it in the atmosphere of this House. However, I would be

loath to see an army of a military dimension being substituted by an army of criminals. I do not state that in any sensationalist way. Both Governments have tended to underestimate the extent of the criminality, for obvious political reasons. We saw the reports coming through on the sensational raids which took place over the past few days. I would like to see an estimate of the extent of this particularly evil empire we just discovered. I do not believe it happened overnight. The IRA has run these rackets for many years. What appears to have happened is that while the IRA and Sinn Féin have run these rackets for many years—

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** Is Senator Ross giving equal time to his colleagues?

**Mr. Ross:** I am.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** In that case the Senator is in his final minute.

**Mr. Ross:** While the IRA has given up its arms, it seems to have handed over a legacy of criminality, which is yielding an extraordinary amount of money to an organisation which will perpetuate it. I am worried that the Government is not pursuing this with the vigour we should expect. I am worried because I suspect that, unbeknown to us, things are going on behind the scenes that may lead to a certain tolerance of criminality so that the people involved may be brought further down the road towards a political solution. That is a real danger.

Some obvious recent cases point towards the apparent existence — I will say no more than that — of money laundering in various forums in Ireland. It seems that we know that the criminal empire is massive but the paucity of arrests after all these raids is striking. We know that hotels, pubs and cash businesses throughout the island are run by these subversives but the high-profile cases and charges one might expect have not happened. One wonders whether for political reasons, for what both Governments consider to be the greater good, these people are not pursued with the vigour that one might expect for such wrongdoers. It may well be that organs of the State are pursuing organisations involved in this criminality but it may also be the case that the individuals involved in this criminality are, for some reason, not pursued with the necessary vigour.

**Mr. Norris:** I agree with the distribution of bouquets on which my colleagues have embarked but I would also give bouquets to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Dermot Ahern, for his determination in the matter, to Dr. Garret FitzGerald and to Mr. Albert Reynolds, who played a crucial significant role. I would also include even Mr. Blair, whose blundering bull in a china shop attitude towards Iraq is such a con-

trast to the progress he has made on Northern Ireland.

On what the Minister said about the transition to a political solution, I absolutely agree. He said that the IRA's move away from military activity must be sustained but it is up to us to encourage that by welcoming rather than begrudging the imaginative way in which the move has happened. I certainly welcome the move. The Minister also referred to loyalist paramilitaries, which I believe are a real problem. There has been a drop-off to virtually nil in things such as punishment beatings by the provisional movement but the same is not true of the loyalist paramilitaries. As one who comes from a Unionist background in this part of the country, I condemn and deplore what is being done by the loyalist paramilitaries, who are neither loyal nor Protestant or Christian in any sense. They stand roundly condemned.

The reinstatement of democratic rule through representative institutions in the North of Ireland is important. It is interesting that politicians on all sides are hungering for that but it is curious that the voters, I gather, do not really care any more. That needs to be addressed, because it is important that the institutions are reinstated. One way in which we could help that is by living up to our obligations on cross-Border co-operation. As Senator McHugh highlighted last week, the extension of the railway line from Northern Ireland to Letterkenny was suggested by the British. We should also push co-operation of that sort as well.

I note the disjunction between the IMC and General de Chastelain. I am not a conspiracy theorist, but I point out that several newspapers remarked on the fact that the information, which was a bit vague, was supplied by the PSNI and MI5. To my mind, that puts a question mark over it.

It is interesting that the DUP has come up with the idea of a shadow Assembly. That should be explored. I very much welcome the fact that Jeffrey Donaldson and other such people whom I regard as very dour come down here to appear on "Questions and Answers" where they have an opportunity to experience at first hand the audience's response. I am sure it is good for those politicians to hear people with strong Dublin accents take a view that is not entirely dissimilar to their own.

On the issue of whether the paramilitaries are like the Mafia, I have said for a long time that the similarities are obvious. The Mafia emerged from a similar background in which people who had fought for the rights of the oppressed then entered criminality. A real problem is that middle-aged people who have spent their whole life in an aura of excitement in which they have been involved in bank robberies and so on were presumably paid from some central source. If that source is just cut off, what do those people do? I think we need to bite the bullet and make some accommodation by, if appropriate, bringing them

[Mr. Norris.]

into some kind of policing role or make allowance for some kind of payment to them. I do not know how, but those people will need to be weaned away.

**Acting Chairman (Labhrás Ó Murchú):** Senator Norris has one minute remaining.

**Mr. Norris:** I believe the situation is generally pretty hopeful but progress will be gradual. It is significant that DUP representatives regularly appear on our airwaves to discuss, in a way that is not notably hostile, serious political issues with Southern politicians. That is the way forward and I am glad to live in a time when such an historic shift is taking place.

**Mr. Quinn:** I congratulate the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Dermot Ahern, on his birthday today. I gather that means I will not see him at my speech at a function in Dundalk tonight but he will be in our thoughts.

Rather than concentrate on the Minister's speech, I will mention two or three examples of how we can do something in this part of our island that will help in the years to come. Some years ago I was accompanied by a company colleague when I went to buy a wedding present from a shop in Grafton Street. When I decided to buy some linen that came from Northern Ireland, my colleague from south of Dublin asked why I did not buy something of our own. I realised then that, having had parents who came from Northern Ireland, I regarded the North as part of our own and it had not dawned on me not to regard linen from Northern Ireland as anything but our own. When my company decided to identify products made in Ireland by putting a shamrock on the shelf opposite such products, I was asked by some people whether products from Northern Ireland should be labelled with the shamrock. It never dawned on me not to do so. My reason for mentioning those incidents is that I believe we need an attitude change down here because those of us who believe in a united island of Ireland still think, somewhere at the back of our minds, in terms of them and us.

Perhaps one thing we can do is to encourage people to visit Northern Ireland. In November I went to the North to speak at the British Council of Shopping Centres conference, which was the biggest conference ever to take place in Belfast. The more than 2,000 people who turned up for the conference had come mainly from Britain but what they saw was a new Belfast. I travel to the North quite frequently to visit relatives, but on this occasion I spent four days doing all the tourist things. I believe it would be of huge benefit if the State encouraged its citizens to travel to the North and to mix with people there because part of what I learned there came from meeting people I would not normally have met. At the Hilton Hotel, I asked the porter or conci-

erge, George, where I could eat. He directed me to a restaurant round the corner, where the waitress was called Victoria. I asked her whether she knew someone who could show us round Belfast, so she got us a taxi driver called Walter. The very names George, Victoria and Walter suggested to me that they did not come from the same background as mine. It was also clear to me that they seldom met people who come from my background, religion and tradition. I believe it would be of immense benefit for the long-term future of the relationships between the North and the rest of the country if we could find reasons to visit the North, which is actually a smashing place for tourism. I know great work is being done and that now, much more so than in the past, people are being encouraged to visit the North. The attractive advertising that is now being used is not only good value for money but is useful in the long term. It would be very useful in terms of the long-term peace on this island if we could get to know those Northerners much better than we have in the past and if we could give them the chance to meet us to express ideas in a convivial atmosphere even if it is only in a pub, a golf club or otherwise. Let us think that through. We need a change of attitude down here. We can do something about it ourselves and the benefit will be long-standing.

**Mr. Minihan:** I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Treacy, and I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Dermot Ahern, for his contribution and for remaining in the House for so long. It is encouraging we are having this debate in the context of yesterday's IMC report. The report stated the IMC feels "there are indications of a dynamic of change occurring in the Northern Ireland, though it is patchy in its occurrence and impact". The general feeling — positive yet tinged with concern — is reflected in my statement, as I am sure it is in many others. I would like to explain why.

There remains good and bad. The IMC reports have been described as prompting a glass half full or half empty response from political figures, members of the public and political commentators who have used that analogy. This report is no different. Dwelling on the positive or the negative is the ploy of interested parties on each side of the political divide in Northern Ireland. I do not believe it is necessary or appropriate to do the same. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that different criteria apply to each side of the Border. We must not fall into the trap of applying the same criteria for participation in an administration or an assembly with participation in a sovereign government. That error suits some but it will not be made by me or the Progressive Democrats.

As I said, we should not place inordinate emphasis on either the positive or the negative. We need balance so let me begin with the positive. The House must acknowledge that progress

is being made in Northern Ireland and commend the work undertaken by the Governments, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and others, to push the sometimes inert political process forward. The IMC's confirmation that the IRA's paramilitary activity has ceased since July last and that the IRA leadership has taken the strategic decision to end its armed campaign and pursue the political path is truly welcome. The commission states that the organisation had decided to pursue a political course and eschew terrorism. It is worth reflecting on that. If we just rattle off the line, its significance is diminished somewhat. The end of the armed campaign, pursuit of the political path and eschewing terrorism are developments people on this island literally prayed for on bended knee for decades. Indeed, people around the world pleaded over and over again for this happen. In September 1979 in Drogheda, Pope John Paul II said to the men of violence "on my knees I beg you to turn away from the path of violence and return to the ways of peace". More progress can and should be made but we must look at what has been done.

The IMC report states there have been no murders, no recruitment and no bank robberies. The commission has noted the continuing developments towards properly administered community restorative justice. The House will be aware of, in the IMC's words, the critical role this has to play "in helping wean communities away from a reliance on, and control by, paramilitaries". Nothing must inhibit the development of normal policing in Northern Ireland.

In terms of the IMC's specific recommendations, we must not ignore its belief that financial measures against Sinn Féin should not continue. If parties or individuals are minded to kick up plenty of dust when sanctions are levied against groups, they should also be minded to recognise when those sanctions cease.

There is much to be positive about regarding developments in Northern Ireland. The positives should be enunciated clearly but, and there always seems to be one, there are problems which cannot be ignored. To provide the balance I referred to at the outset, we must also look at the negatives. They must be enunciated clearly also.

Regrettably, the IMC reported that some IRA members were still engaged in criminality. It also determined that intelligence gathering was continuing. Worryingly, this activity appears to be authorised by the leadership. We accept that complete control over an organisation the size of the IRA is difficult, if not next to impossible. Individuals, call them rogues or whatever, perhaps even a small group of them, will no doubt act in unwanted, illegal and criminal ways. The concern emerges when that activity is authorised by the leadership or when the leadership gives support and succour to those so-called rogues when they are caught.

I remind the House of Adare and the death of Jerry McCabe. The IRA said it had nothing to

do with it and that it was not an IRA-sanctioned operation. However, once those involved were caught, the IRA wanted them released under the Good Friday Agreement. That is what the people cannot tolerate. When the rogue is caught, he or she must be outed, not given succour and comfort.

No society can tolerate a group which appears to retain long-term intentions to gather intelligence. I express my deep unease and that of my party at this element of the report. Intelligence gathering which will be used for political gain, intimidation, etc., is a very dangerous way for this country to go. While I am on that subject of criminality, what am I to say to the families of Robert McCartney and Joseph Rafferty? Am I to say to the McCartneys and the Raffertys that Robert and Joseph died for Ireland in a fair struggle or am I to say this was a criminal act? We must be very mindful of where we draw the line in terms of what is acceptable behaviour of a so-called political party when taking a stand on these types of issues.

This is compounded by the view that senior members of the IRA are involved in money laundering and other crime and the reports that the leadership appears to have sanctioned some criminal activities. I have stated before my belief that the IRA has not gone out of business but, in fact, has gone into business. This report confirms those views.

As the record of the House will show, for many years, I have stated the importance of making a very clear distinction between paramilitarism and criminality, neither of which is acceptable. The exploitation of financial assets the IRA has previously acquired is evidence it is going into business. I remain deeply concerned about these claims. Make no mistake about it, this serious accumulation of business interests will be used for political gain to undermine the political process of this State and, ultimately, the State itself.

Perhaps the most worrying development is the revelation of credible reports that not all IRA weapons and ammunition were handed over for decommissioning in September. This is not only a serious challenge to the relationship between the IMC and General deChastelain's decommissioning body, it poses a challenge to the foundation on which further progress is to be made. Nevertheless, I do not believe this apparent difference represents any immediate impediment to progress and talks on Northern Ireland.

In the first instance, we must deal with any differences in security assessments made by the PSNI, MI5, the Garda and our own military intelligence service. This will be an important step in restoring the type of confidence that was rightly felt and expressed last September. I hope the Government will implement a process to assess those different intelligence reports. The Minister for Foreign Affairs has correctly pointed out that yesterday's report also poses challenges for loyalist paramilitaries, who must also act in a manner

[Mr. Minihan.]

that is congruent with the action taken by the IRA from July last.

I will conclude with three brief points. First, the International Monitoring Commission report represents both an asset and a challenge for both the Governments and the political parties. As the commission stated, we must “reassert the primacy of politics” by witnessing engagement between the parties. Undoubtedly, 2006 will prove to be a decisive year for the peace process and I join in the calls from the IMC that all parties must take the necessary steps to allow trust and confidence to be built.

It has been stated that politics must mean action. Hence, my second point is that the arrangements and timetable for the restoration of the devolved institutions must be the focus of the talks which will begin on 6 February. There is no barrier to this progress. Unfortunately, there has been some mistaken equation of the situations on either side of the Border. There is a significant difference between the devolved assembly and administration in the north of Ireland, and the sovereign Government of the Republic of Ireland. Specifically, but not exclusively, I refer to the responsibility for justice and State security. Those who state that “if it is not good enough for you, it is not good enough for us”, should stop and think.

Third, I, the Progressive Democrats and undoubtedly the people of this entire island are pleased that there are indications of a dynamic of change occurring in Northern Ireland. No murders and no robberies have taken place and while we are pleased, we are not grateful. We are not grateful because these abominations should never have been visited upon the people of this island in the first place. We will not thank people for refraining from murder, targeting, robbery, protection rackets, extortion, etc. While we will be glad when it happens, we will not gush with admiration for those who drop smoking guns in the bin. We must not sell out the principles on which our system of governance and justice is based. The system that pertains in Northern Ireland, as agreed to in referenda, requires that republicans participate in an administration. No such requirement exists in this State and political parties on both sides should ponder these points.

I commend the work of the governments, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Justice, Equality and Law Reform, their officials, the International Monitoring Commission and the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning. The Taoiseach, the British Prime Minister and the parties in the North deserve specific praise and encouragement. The International Monitoring Commission makes the point that this island, and Northern Ireland in particular, is becoming a better place. As I stated, many prayers have been offered over the years in the hope that what we are seeing signs of today will come to pass. This must be acknowledged

and welcomed. On behalf of the Progressive Democrats, I am glad to so do.

**Mr. Ryan:** Is iontach agus maith an rud é go raibh an tAire Gnóthaí Eachtracha anseo agus go labhair sé go cuimsitheach agus go cruinn faoin todhchaí mar a thuigeann an Rialtas é. I always make the point in debates on this topic that I first sat in this House from 1981 to 1993, until I had an unfortunate misunderstanding with the electorate. Lest any other Member says it first, perhaps they saw through me for a while.

However, it was a terrible time, even if one leaves out the horrors of the economic situation. In this House we spoke almost every week to register some horror or other, perpetrated by someone or other, in the name of one or other of the allegedly conflicting traditions on this island. Members did so with a vocabulary that seemed increasingly less capable of being useful. Those who carried out such acts in the name of the values and political system in which I believe consequently probably merited some stronger disassociation than those who did so in the name of the equally honourable tradition of Ulster Unionism. That tradition has much within it pertaining to concepts such as freedom of religion. It was founded at a time when Roman Catholicism may not have had the best credentials on the same issue.

It was a terrible time and I remember the former Senator, John Robb, being close to tears a number of times. When one went to bed, one did not know what horror would await when turning on the radio the next morning. By comparison, peace is a monotonous process. I mean that not in a negative sense, but in the sense that it is a monotone. It is something that is present and which one takes for granted extremely quickly. This is not the case as far as the Governments are concerned. The Government does a fine job in respect of Northern Ireland and no Opposition Members wish to take issue with it in any major way. During one phase of the talks, I had some reservations about its focus upon the DUP and Sinn Féin, and voiced them at the time. However, we have been well represented by successive Governments, including the present one. The same can be said of the Taoiseach, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and his predecessor. They have looked after the interests of both the State and of reconciliation on this island to a degree with which we can all be comfortable.

That said, we are required to reflect on matters as they stand today. I have read the International Monitoring Commission report and am aware of what are probably only differences in detail between the commission and General de Chastelain. It is a pity that what I believe to be a red herring about a couple of weapons, which may or may not have been retained for personal protection, was not dealt with in some fashion other than in the context of a formal report from a body set up by the two Governments. I believe that

whatever agency supplied such information to the International Monitoring Commission would have been better advised to attempt to draw the attention of General de Chastelain and the independent International Commission on Decommissioning to the anomaly, if it exists, and invite it to clarify the matter. While I hesitate to impute any negative motives to whatever source from which it came, it is not helpful and it is a pity that it was not dealt with differently. I do not believe that its significance should be overstated. While it is not of great significance, it will become an issue which can be used, which is a pity.

Like many others, I am somewhat perturbed by the suggestions of intelligence gathering. I have asked more than once, both in the House and at British-Irish Interparliamentary Body meetings, what is the current function of the IRA. While I do not wish to suggest that it should formally make some announcement to the effect that it is winding up, I would like someone from Sinn Féin to explain its function. If its function is to be covert — I do not mean illegal — gathering of information about political opponents, I am not terribly keen on that and am unsure whether it is a model for political progress.

I am aware of a member of Fianna Fáil whose name appeared in the newspapers recently. It is difficult to know why, in modern Ireland, this was so, because he was outed as being gay. Apparently, everyone who knew him and his family long knew this, as did those who voted for him. He alleged that members of Sinn Féin were involved in this campaign. Gathering information that might be embarrassing and, therefore, politically useful to them, is not the way to win the trust of those whose trust they must win. Sometimes, Sinn Féin, despite its significant progress and major contribution to the peace process, fails to remember that trust cannot be legislated into existence. When the party makes pronouncements to the world that it is up to the British and Irish Governments to make the Agreement work, it is divorced from the reality. Nothing can be made to work if people do not want to make it work. Similarly, it will only work if people are prepared to trust a party because of its record or the way it has changed or a context has been created in which they are prepared to take the risk to do so. In each case, the free choice of the other half of the trusting relationship must be sorted out and people cannot be forced to make such a choice. Life can be made difficult for them but they can only be persuaded and not forced to do so. For example, as was highlighted by the recent election in Palestine, the people of that country will not be forced to trust Israel by taking away their funding. That is self-evident. I appeal again to Sinn Féin members to realise that. Trust cannot be developed through their inner perspective but rather through the way the party is seen by others, justifiably or not, and that is a matter for themselves. Trust must be won.

I am more than a little perturbed by the evidence of criminal activity and the recent activities of the CAB and the Assets Recovery Agency, which are correct. However, when the hotel in which I stay is under suspicion, I am more than a little perturbed.

**Dr. M. Hayes:** Is it under suspicion because the Senator is staying there?

**Mr. Ryan:** I believe in due process and I do not intend to move out of the hotel. I am reliably informed that a senior member of the Government, who has a security position, also stays in the hotel. Life gets complicated.

A satisfactory explanation has not yet been provided regarding the Stormontgate-Donaldson affair. I am old enough to know that not everything can be said about an incident at the one time but questions remain, the replies to a number of which could legitimate Sinn Féin's reservations about elements of the northern security services. Whatever the suspicions about what was happening in Stormont, the arrival of a barrage of police dressed to kill to raid the offices of a political party was a poor image of trust, together with the emergence of Mr. Donaldson as a police agent and the disingenuous reference to the large number of stolen documents found in the office, which it later emerged were found in Mr. Donaldson's house. I am the last person to believe in conspiracies. Most conspiracies develop to cover up stupid mistakes. There may well be a conspiracy because somebody in the security forces made a stupid mistake and is endeavouring to cover it up by weaving complications.

I refer to the issue of reconciliation. I appeal to the Government to bring the work of the British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body closer together. The BIIPB still awaits the arrival of our Unionist colleagues. We keep hoping they will join and it is sometimes difficult for us to understand why they have not. The more extreme manifestations of Tory politics engage quite happily with the body and members of the Unionist parties, who are sensible by that standard, are disinclined to so engage and that is a pity. If institutions are established, which bring us together in sensible ways in our common interest, we cannot continue with a totally independent intergovernmental council and a totally independent parliamentary tier. The role of government is to be accountable to parliament and the role of parliamentarians is to make government accountable. A formalised institutional structure must be examined, which will bring those two bodies into closer harmony. There are issues about which one would like to ask many questions.

A hair raising presentation on the state of the Northern Ireland economy was given at the Edinburgh meeting of the BIIPB and it is an enormously significant matter. Northern Ireland is so

[Mr. Ryan.]

dependent on public finances that the private sector is practically non-existent and the level to which there is a self-sustaining private sector should be of serious concern to anybody who will have responsibility for the governance of Northern Ireland in the future. A closer working relationship between the British-Irish council or a more appropriate body and the BIIPB would greatly help. However, when the BIIPB body meets, it does not help when my Sinn Féin friends describe anybody who says a word vaguely sympathetic to Unionism as a "Unionist". That does not reflect much of an insight into the difference between understanding somebody's position and agreeing with it.

Ironically, one of the spin-offs of the collapse of the Northern Ireland Assembly is that because the North-South bodies have become inter-governmental bodies, for the first time since 1922 one can ask questions in the House of Commons about the condition of the River Shannon. It is a considerable contribution by a republican party that there is limited British sovereignty over aspects of how we do our business.

I support all my colleagues who stated it is high time Sinn Féin did what is obvious to everybody else and accepted that Northern Ireland policing has been transformed and the best thing the party could do to win trust across the political spectrum is to join the relevant policing bodies, fully participate and acknowledge that Northern Ireland has an acceptable policing and judicial system, from which we could learn a great deal.

At the risk of being controversial and falling out with my own party, the distinction made between Sinn Féin in government in the North and in the South is becoming more difficult to make. It is becoming easier for the Unionists to say, "You accept them in your Government and we will accept them in ours". At the beginning of the peace process, it was different but, years later, Sinn Féin has moved further away from violence. We will sooner or later have to confront whether there is a logic to our position.

**Dr. Mansergh:** I wish to share my time with Senator Maurice Hayes. I would like to say at the outset that in future when debates on Northern Ireland are organised, more time should be given so that those who want to participate can do so, and perhaps there should be a more even distribution of time.

I welcome the Minister of State and the speech by the Minister for Foreign Affairs. The Minister goes back to the beginning of the peace process when he took part in a meeting in Dundalk in 1988 with the leadership of Sinn Féin. I would also like to take this opportunity to praise the commitment and dedication of his Department, which has always been at the centre of Anglo-Irish and Northern Ireland affairs. Together with their colleagues from the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Justice,

Equality and Law Reform, I know they will do their best to get the Good Friday Agreement working fully.

It is important to distinguish the wood from the trees, even though I am not sure we are always good at doing so. While there were bad setbacks last year, there was also enormous progress with the ending of IRA activities and the complete decommissioning of arms. If it had happened earlier, it is difficult to see how the devolved institutions would not be running.

I am quite depressed sometimes by the reflection that the institutions have been suspended for four years. Political progress is very slow and one would need to be a considerable optimist to expect an early breakthrough. It was said about the Middle East that politics should be pursued as if there were no security issues, and the security issues should be pursued as if there were no politics. We need to remind ourselves that the power-sharing executive is devolution for quite limited purposes. Given that it is for quite limited purposes, I am not in favour of settling for some sort of interim half shilling. It must be a fully restored executive.

Like other speakers, I am troubled by what happened in 2002. I am not suggesting that the fault was all on one side but, as we see to this day, there are private wars going on of one kind or another. With regard to the two reports yesterday, the fact is that General de Chastelain and the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning were given the responsibility to determine whether the IRA had decommissioned its weapons. Its report carries much more weight with me on that point than the IMC.

I welcome Mr. McGuinness's statement last night that smuggling of diesel and so on at the Border was wrong and, effectively, that the people concerned should be prosecuted. I repudiate completely the suggestion by Senator Ross that the Governments are going easy on those involved for political reasons. One need only read the recent headlines in the newspaper for which he writes about businesses being raided and so on. I have never heard a more ludicrous suggestion. All the evidence of the past 12 months is that the Government, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and all the law enforcement agencies have been going relentlessly after the provisionals. Please let us have no more nonsense and insinuations about some kind of appeasement.

The Government must pay attention to both dissidents and loyalists. Despite certain reservations, Sinn Féin should be part of policing. My final point relates to North-South co-operation for which there is much scope. I am pleased it is going ahead. The British Government is the one that sets limits in terms of corporation tax and its currency policy. I am of the view that in the end one will only establish a single island economy in the full sense of the word when people decide by

agreement and consent to establish a united Ireland.

**Dr. M. Hayes:** While I am grateful to Senator Mansergh for sharing his time with me, I regret that he should have to do so, because the House could benefit from his wisdom and experience in this subject.

It is a pity that bodies which were set up to provide clarity in these matters should have produced confusion. I regret that the IMC and IICD are drawing from the same intelligence pool and producing what appears to be different conclusions. I live in the North and, as the Minister said, the place is transformed and the quality of life is better. We are in danger of asking people to prove negatives, particularly Sinn Féin, which needs to build up confidence. It could do so by being involved in policing. It is an interesting mirror image of its attitude to policing when it says it will join when the whole thing is ideal, and the DUP says it will talk to Sinn Féin when it reaches the absolute state of grace. Before going into policing, Sinn Féin would need to be sure that the DUP would not use it as an excuse to walk out. Policing is key to the process.

Criminality, which is taking place, is a problem. The question is whether it is the criminality of individuals or directed by a central intelligence. I think criminality is endemic and we have always had smuggling. The problem is deciding whether people are paramilitaries moonlighting as smugglers or smugglers moonlighting as paramilitaries. In these circumstances, people should accept that the important issue is to see that politics is working. Given that people persuaded paramilitary organisations to give up the guns — the IMC said it is satisfied that the strategic intention is to move in that direction — it is important that this is not made more difficult.

I would be surprised if there is much progress before the end of the year. It is a tough old slog. I am not tremendously bothered about the DUP proposal for a two-tier process which would include dangers. A two-tier process will not be acceptable. It appears to me from the DUP's stand that if trust, even minimal trust, could be established, these matters could be telescoped, and the more quickly this is done the better. If I were the Minister, I do not think I would die in the ditch for the d'Hondt principle. As Senator Brian Hayes said, it is the prospect of having nine separate ministries with no collective responsibility.

I am happy that these generous remarks were made about the Taoiseach and his contribution, which are totally deserved. I wish the Minister well.

**Mr. Bradford:** While my time is limited, I am pleased to have an opportunity to say a few words on this important issue. I concur with Senator Mansergh that we would need more time for

these debates so that the maximum number of Senators can contribute.

We must try to measure progress in Northern Ireland in a different way from what one would do if we were discussing political progress in the Republic of Ireland. We must remember where we are coming from. Every day that passes without a bullet being fired, a bomb exploding, a knee-capping taking place or a community being terrorised in Northern Ireland is a day of progress. It may not be the total progress we hope to achieve but it is progress when there is some degree of normality.

Senator Ryan referred earlier to the debates in the Oireachtas in the early 1980s — I was here in the late 1980s. When we spoke about Northern Ireland, we could only speak one language, that of condemnation. It was proper condemnation of what was the most recent atrocity. Thankfully, we have moved on. Sometimes we believe that a so-called permanent and final solution is just around the corner and must be achieved. I pose the question that the final agreement to which everybody aspires, and people might have different versions of that, could well be beyond the current crop of politicians and generation of people on this island. We must remember from where we have come — the dreadful days and times and the dreadful bitterness and division. If we could ensure the communities across the country and the counties of Northern Ireland co-operate and work together, that would be a major step forward.

I welcome Senator Quinn's comments on projects as simple but as important as tourism, the need to encourage those involved in the industry to meet and people in the Republic, in particular, to visit Northern Ireland on a more frequent basis. I posed the following questions to members attending various political meetings in my constituency on many occasions. I asked how many of them had been in Britain, to which the response was 100%; how many of them had been in the United States, to which the response was 70% or 80%; and how many of them had been in Northern Ireland, to which the response was only 50% at most. Some people have a mental barrier to visiting Northern Ireland and we must work on that. The "them and us" mental barrier is part of the physical barrier whereby contacts between people and communities break down.

The economic issues briefly referred to must be addressed. The state of the Northern Ireland economy is one that will pose a threat to every community in Northern Ireland. We must play a role in painting a picture of that economy.

I welcome yesterday's report of the IMC. It indicates that positive steps continue to be taken. It rightly refers to an issue from which we cannot move away, namely, criminality. One form of violence within or against the community cannot be replaced by another form of violence. It is important that our Government remains vigilant. I concur with Senator Mansergh that the actions



[Mr. Bradford.]

of the Garda and the State over the past 12 months indicate a strong Government response, and that response must be maintained and be even more vigilant.

On the issue of policing, I concur with what every Senator who referred to it said, namely, that if Sinn Féin wishes to view itself as a fully-fledged democratic party, it must not only be willing to support policing but willing to take part in the arrangements. There is no excuse for Sinn Féin remaining outside the policing arrangements. We look for signals of trust and goodwill from all those on all sides of the equation from time to time. The strongest signal of trust and goodwill Sinn Féin could deliver to the community would be to involve itself as a political party in the policing process. A normal civilised democratic society needs a democratic police force. Major progress has been made in regard to policing in Northern Ireland. The final part of the jigsaw is the involvement of Sinn Féin and there is no excuse for it delaying that any further.

I hope progress can be made in the restoration of the political institutions. Reflecting on what happened within the administration while it existed, while the structure was weak and progress was slow at the start, there was great co-operation between the parties. It had a dynamic which must be reinstated, built on and maintained.

We all know from our dealings with people across the communities in Northern Ireland that the political parties are well behind public opinion on this issue. The people of Northern Ireland, regardless of their political persuasion, want their political parties to take part in the decision-making process. They want decisions to be made not in London but in their own home territory. They want their political parties to argue their case across the table in Northern Ireland and not to be beholden to a decision by the British Government. I appeal to the political parties to ensure that, in their dialogue and involvement with the British and Ireland Governments over the next number of weeks and months, they show generosity. That is required from the political parties. Generosity is offered by the communities and the ordinary people, a phrase I do not use, in Northern Ireland, but they demand leadership from their politicians which is not forthcoming.

There are many other issues to which I would have liked to refer. I congratulate the Minister and the Government on their ongoing efforts. They have the support of the Oireachtas. This is big political project. I do not believe it is imperative that in five, ten or 15 years' time we have a so-called permanent answer to the puzzle of Northern Ireland and the bigger puzzle of the island of Ireland. We need to ensure that the people are being governed in a fair fashion with democratic control in a free and a peaceful society. That would represent great progress for this generation.

There was reference to the First World War on the Order of Business. During the past 50 or 60 years some people from this island spilled their blood. Now that we have stopped that from happening we can bed down democracy and civil discourse between people and political parties. That would be great progress. If in 25, 30 or 40 years' time someone wants to present a new political project, that would be fine. However, we need to get the institutions up and running and to keep people talking and working together.

**Mr. B. Hayes:** Before the Minister of State replies to the debate, I wish to point out that there was general dissatisfaction about the time allocated for these statements. Some Members who wanted to contribute could not do so and there was dissatisfaction about the divvying up of the time.

**Ms O'Rourke:** What is the Senator saying?

**Mr. B. Hayes:** There was general dissatisfaction about the time allocated.

**Ms O'Rourke:** I take it the Senator is referring to the overall debate.

**Mr. B. Hayes:** Yes. Many Members on both sides of the House who wanted to contribute could not do so and they may want an opportunity to speak on this matter again.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** I am governed by the House on this matter.

**Mr. B. Hayes:** I know.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** I call on the Minister of State to conclude.

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Mr. Treacy):** Is cúis áthais dom an deis seo a bheith agam páirt a ghlacadh sa díospóireacht an-tábhachtach seo, agus gabhaim buíochas leis na Seanadóirí uilig as ucht chaighdeán iontach na díospóireachta.

I have listened with great interest to the statements made by the Members of this House. I would like to acknowledge again the support and encouragement of all Senators for the work of both Governments on the peace process in Northern Ireland. As the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Dermot Ahern, said, the job of the two Governments is to lead that process forward, notwithstanding the many challenges that arise along the way.

The reports of the Independent Monitoring Commission, IMC, and the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, IICD, are key contributions to our work and to achieving progress in this area. The IMC report published yesterday has attracted much comment here. The report was sought by both Governments, particularly in the context of the Pro-

visional IRA statement last July, and it has given us the first comprehensive assessment of IRA activity since then and since the decommissioning of IRA arms last September.

The report confirms significant progress in the period under review. It confirms that Provisional IRA paramilitary activity has ceased since 28 July last and, crucially, that the Provisional IRA leadership has taken the strategic decision to end its armed campaign and pursue the political path. These are positive and welcome findings.

However, we take very seriously the reports of continued criminal activity and intelligence gathering. These issues must be addressed by the Provisional IRA. While a great deal has been achieved, as the IMC report recognises, continued effort is clearly required and will be expected immediately.

The IICD report, also published yesterday, noted some progress in contact with loyalist paramilitary groups. It also confirmed that its previous assessment, that the IRA decommissioned the totality of its weapons last September, was correct.

The Government has complete confidence in the independence and integrity of the IMC and the IICD. The IICD report confirms its previous assessment on decommissioning. The IMC report states that over the coming period the IMC will examine any implications that the IICD report, or any other developments, may have for its work. The Government's role in this is to let these two bodies fulfil their respective mandates and, informed by their work, to lead the process forward.

Clearly, we are not yet where we want to be in this process. We are not yet at a point where there is sufficient trust and confidence for all parties to engage with each other.

The transition to politics is not easy, as the Minister for Foreign Affairs has said. The process in which we are engaged is particularly demanding on those who have always pursued their political aims through politics alone and have abhorred violence from any quarter at all times. The IMC and IICD reports make a persuasive case for talks, collective engagement and the primacy of politics. The political, economic and social challenges faced by Northern Ireland also make a persuasive case for politics. We have come far, through troubled times, over three decades. Following yesterday's assessment, the Government believes we have taken one more step along the way. We have made enough progress since the difficult days of the beginning of last year to allow us to start talking again.

The Governments, which are acutely conscious of the responsibilities they bear in this process, are fully prepared to exercise those responsibilities. The Minister, Deputy Dermot Ahern, and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr. Peter Hain, will approach the agenda for talks with the parties next Monday in that spirit. The parties have a role to play in acting on the promises they have made. They should come to the

table prepared to act in good faith. We are convinced that the political parties are best placed to lay the foundations for the best possible future for the people of Northern Ireland. There is no substitute for locally-elected politicians working in a partnership government for the people they democratically represent and who democratically elected them to do so. Such a conviction will sustain the work of the Government as it strives for the full restoration this year of the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement and for the peaceful and stable future that all the people of Northern Ireland deserve.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** That concludes the statements on Northern Ireland. When is it proposed to sit again?

**Ms O'Rourke:** At 2.30 p.m. next Tuesday, 9 February 2006.

### Adjournment Matters.

#### Job Losses.

**Dr. Mansergh:** I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Tim O'Malley, to the House. The loss of its last manufacturing plant is a bad blow for Carrick-on-Suir, which is a medium-sized provincial town. There are other manufacturing plants not too far from the town, but I am talking about the town itself. SRAM Ireland, which manufactures bicycle components, announced earlier this week that it intends to discontinue its assembly and distribution operations at Carrick-on-Suir. The company probably located in the town in the first instance because a famous cyclist, Mr. Seán Kelly, is a native of the locality. A total of 53 jobs — 31 permanent and 22 temporary — will be lost as a result of SRAM Ireland's decision. I understand that 11 employees who are involved in coordinating operations will move to Waterford.

Carrick-on-Suir, which is a RAPID town, has an unemployment rate of 14%, which is well above the national average of just over 4%. I do not want to paint too bleak a picture of towns like Carrick-on-Suir, which have seen a great deal of progress. Similar problems were faced in Tipperary approximately three years ago, when Pall Corporation announced it was dispensing with approximately two thirds of its operation. We know from experience that it is not easy to replace manufacturing jobs in such locations, unfortunately.

The industrial development agencies should reconsider their approach to certain towns. Circumstances have changed in the past three years as the populations of towns like Carrick-on-Suir and Tipperary have grown quite rapidly and their infrastructure has improved. Both towns are on the railway line between Limerick and Waterford. Carrick-on-Suir is quite close to Waterford, just as Tipperary is quite close to Limerick and the rest of the Shannon region.

[Dr. Mansergh.]

South Tipperary County Council recently announced that it plans to develop some industrial units on recently acquired IDA Ireland lands. The Mill River business park in Carrick-on-Suir is quite vibrant. It has been suggested that Treasury Holdings has a long-term plan of conducting some major development in the Carrick-on-Suir area, just across the border in County Kilkenny, but no final decision has been taken on the matter.

I would like the Minister of State to outline the plans of the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the agencies for which he is responsible to assist those who will be most affected by the closure of SRAM Ireland. What other employment possibilities exist for them? IDA Ireland and Forfás should be encouraged to look again at towns which one fears they might almost have written off. There are a number of industrial plants in Cashel, for example, which is smaller than both Carrick-on-Suir and Tipperary. There is nothing inherently implausible about attracting employment to such places, particularly as our cities become more congested. Places like Carrick-on-Suir with unemployment well above the national average deserve the particular attention of the Government. There was a political consensus in the county that Carrick-on-Suir should be considered along with Tipperary town for decentralisation. Obviously decentralisation would not help directly those involved in the SRAM closure but it would help build up the town further. Towns of that size should be looked at again from the point of view of promoting them as they have become much more attractive because of Government investment in schooling, sports facilities, cultural facilities and the growth of housing around them.

**Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley):** I thank Senator Mansergh for raising this matter on the Adjournment.

On Tuesday last, 31 January 2006, SRAM Corporation announced to its staff that it would cease operations in Carrick-on-Suir with the loss of 53 permanent and temporary jobs. Some 11 permanent staff will be retained in distribution support activities and finance. The redundancies are being attributed to ongoing cost pressures and falling sales. The company had informed IDA Ireland of its decision earlier in the day. The company intends to end manufacturing production and distribution activities at the Carrick-on-Suir site and transfer the remaining employees, who are involved in support activities, to new offices in Waterford city.

The role of FÁS, the State training agency, will be particularly important in assisting those who are to lose their jobs. The agency will, as a matter of urgency, make contact with the management and staff of the company in order to outline the support services that FÁS can provide, particularly advice and training opportunities for the

workforce. Finding alternative employment for the workers affected will be a priority for the State development agencies. IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland as well as FÁS will play their part in developing a way forward.

The present IDA strategy for south Tipperary is to concentrate future economic development in Clonmel by developing the town as a first class location for overseas investment. This strategy has been agreed with the South Tipperary County Development Board. At a meeting of Carrick-on-Suir Town Council last year, the agency's plans for south Tipperary and Waterford city were outlined to the council. The need for Carrick-on-Suir to find a way to link into the economic growth centres of Clonmel and Waterford was also underlined.

Carrick-on-Suir is not being neglected. The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment met a delegation from the town council last year. He then met with FÁS and the agency agreed to increase its level of engagement with the long-term unemployed in the town. The process, which commenced last October, will continue throughout 2006.

While the main focus is on Waterford and Clonmel, there are knock-on benefits in sectors such as supply, distribution and transport thus creating further investment and employment opportunities for people in surrounding areas including Carrick-on-Suir. Clearly, Carrick-on-Suir can benefit from its close proximity to both Waterford and Clonmel. The largest single IDA job creation project in 2004 was Guidant with a 1,000 job expansion project in Clonmel and the company will be looking to recruit approximately 200 staff per year, graduates and non-graduates, for the next five years.

The development of community-based enterprise centres is a crucial part of the drive to create new regional enterprise. Enterprise Ireland provided support of €54,852 in 1998 for the setting up of the enterprise centre in Carrick-on-Suir. This centre has been sold to a private developer and the proceeds of that sale have been invested in a new community resource centre for the town. The community enterprise centre is incorporated into a state-of-the-art resource centre. A high quality training facility is at the heart of the community enterprise centre and this facility should bring long-term benefits to the town.

I assure Senator Mansergh that the State development agencies, under the auspices of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, will continue to work closely together and with the county development board, as well as participating in the special working groups set up in October 2004 by the county manager of Tipperary South to deal with job creation issues in the towns of Carrick-on-Suir and Tipperary.

#### **Nursing Home Services.**

**Mr. Moylan:** I welcome the Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children, Deputy

Tim O'Malley, to the House and thank him for coming in to reply to this Adjournment matter, on the need for a 20-bed extension to the age care unit of Riada House, Tullamore, County Offaly. As a former member of the health board the bed issue is important but there were kitchen improvement works and developments in the day care area.

More than 12 months ago there was a problem with the closure of a private nursing home in the area which created huge problems for Offaly patients. The Health Service Executive has been using beds in Mountmellick, County Laois, and Athlone, County Westmeath, for Offaly patients. We have Riada House in Tullamore, Edenderry and a new unit in Birr. The position was reasonably satisfactory until the problem occurred in Rahan. There was then a complete blockage in Edenderry, Mountmellick, Athlone and Birr. There is no spare capacity. A problem arises where a large number of patients who are in the regional hospital in Tullamore should be in step-down facilities or moved elsewhere to allow the hospital work to full capacity.

Given the capital programme for 2006 I ask the Department to give the go-ahead for the extension which has been at architectural planning stage for some time. Such an extension would make an enormous difference to people in the Tullamore area. The Minister of State is well aware of the need for it and I compliment him on the work he is doing around the country in regard to the provision of extra beds for the elderly. While there is a problem it will become serious as time goes on. I look forward to a favourable reply from the Minister of State. I thank him and the Minister, Deputy Harney, for their outstanding work in the health area.

**Mr. T. O'Malley:** I am delighted to have the opportunity to answer this question on behalf of my colleague, the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney. I thank Senator Moylan for raising this matter on the Adjournment.

It is the Department's policy to maintain older people in dignity and independence at home in accordance with their wishes and at the same time to provide high-quality residential care for older people when living at home is no longer possible.

The Government's commitment to the development of a comprehensive range of services for older people has been clearly demonstrated by the significantly increased resources made available in recent years. From 1997 to 2005, inclusive, additional spending on health care services is in excess of €302 million. In 2004, a total of €9.5 million in additional revenue funding was allocated to services for older people and for 2005, this figure was increased to €15.228 million. This funding is being used for a variety of services including the nursing home subvention scheme, home care grants, the home help service, the elder abuse programme and support to voluntary organisations.

In the budget package announced for 2006, additional revenue funding of €150 million in full year costs was allocated — €110 million in 2006 and an additional €40 million in 2007. The prioritisation of all health capital developments is a matter for the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. I have been advised by the HSE that Riada House, Tullamore, County Offaly, is a priority capital development for 2006.

When it is necessary for older people to move into long-term residential care, it is important they have a choice of top quality nursing home care. To this end, the Government is committed to developing the necessary infrastructure to care for older people and deliver services in the best possible manner. A working group has been established by the Department to develop standards for residential care settings for older people. Membership of the group comprises officials from the Department, the HSE, the social services inspectorate and the Irish Health Services Accreditation Board. The group will commence the development of standards for the inspection of both public and private residential care for older people and, in doing so, will consult with appropriate and interested parties.

The majority of our older people are fit and well and leading full, independent lives. However, where this is no longer the case, the Department is committed to providing high quality long-term residential care. The Government has allocated unprecedented levels of resources to ensure that the care we provide for older people is of the highest possible standard, and an indication of how society values and respects the contribution older people have made in the past and continue to make today.

**Mr. Moylan:** I welcome the Minister of State's statement that Riada House, Tullamore, is a priority for development by the HSE in 2006. I thank him for that, and his work in this area.

#### **Burial Facilities.**

**Mr. Coghlan:** I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Tim O'Malley, and thank him for responding to this matter on behalf of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The Minister of State may not be aware that the question of burial facilities for the Muckross community is a long-standing issue. Killarney Town Council discussed the matter with the Minister, Deputy Roche, when he visited the area last year but the request from the Muckross community goes back much further than that. The land in question comprises approximately three acres at Abbeycross, which is located on the main Killarney to Kenmare road as one turns left to go towards Muckross church.

While it is located within its boundaries, it is not an integral part of Killarney National Park. It cannot be regarded as part of the core area and it is not of great environmental value or importance. It is used on a rotating basis for grazing purposes. As one leaves Killarney town going

[Mr. Coghlan.]

towards Muckcross House, the land is on the left. It is not compatible with the UNESCO designation of the overall park. A number of semi-industrial buildings are located close to the land. The national monuments depot of the OPW is also located there, in addition to a car park, a jaunting car stand, domestic houses, a private residence, a church, a village centre, a Church of Ireland graveyard at Killegy, a famous hotel and pub — Molly Darcy's — in the Muckcross Park Hotel.

I am sure the Minister of State will be aware that the land in question was offered for this purpose many years ago when Michael Begley was Parliamentary Secretary at the Office of Public Works. It was approved by the officials in the OPW at that time for burial purposes. This is not a new proposal; it goes back a long time. At that time the residents in the area wanted an extension to the existing burial ground at Muckcross Abbey which is effectively closed as it is full. That is what they were seeking at the time and they did not want to take this land. Killarney Town Council, Kerry County Council and the entire community in Killarney and Muckcross would be happy to avail of the land on this occasion.

This matter can be done on a once-off basis for the common good. The decision can be ring-fenced. I am sure flat paving could be provided and the area could be manicured and maintained in a way that would be compatible with the surrounding area. As the Minister of State is aware, this area is on the left of the road, not on the right where the park proper is located.

**Mr. T. O'Malley:** I thank Senator Coghlan for raising this matter. I make this reply on behalf of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Roche, who apologises for being unable to attend the House. The Minister recently discussed this matter with members of Kerry County Council and Killarney Town Council. I undertook at that time to give the matter further consideration and I expect to be in a position to respond shortly.

The Minister wishes to take this opportunity to outline some of the background to this issue. The responsibility for ensuring the adequate provision of burial facilities for its functional area is a matter for the relevant local authority. I understand that both Killarney Town Council and Kerry County Council are at present considering options in this regard to meet the needs of the Killarney area. I also understand that a new private burial ground with considerable capacity has become available in the area. I am aware that Kerry County Council and Killarney Town

Council have been seeking to use parts of Killarney National Park as a burial ground for some time.

Since 1976, Killarney National Park is subject to a number of significant EU and Irish legal environmental designations. It is a special area of conservation for habitats and species under the EU habitats directive 1992; a special protection area for birds under the EU birds directive 1979; and a natural heritage area under the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2000. Moreover, the national park is currently managed by my Department as a category 2 protected area, in accordance with guidelines set down by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. It has also attracted the prestigious designation as a biosphere reserve by UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. This designation combines objectives of nature conservation and sustainable development. Furthermore, the pristine setting of Killarney National Park has proved an enduring attraction for tourists and locals alike, receiving an estimated 1.5 million visitors a year, which has created a valuable spin-off in terms of business and employment in the area.

The Minister recently launched a five-year management plan for Killarney National Park, which provides a solid platform for the introduction of strategies that have a strong emphasis on the conservation of the natural heritage within the park, while encouraging its appreciation and enjoyment by the public. In the light of the considerations which I have outlined, Senators will appreciate that it is appropriate that any development in an area designated both as a national park and as a special area of conservation should be limited to what would enhance the conservation status of the area or to necessary works for which no alternative location is possible. The Minister will consider the local authorities' request in this context and I hope to be in a position to respond on the matter in the near future.

**Mr. Coghlan:** As the Minister of State will appreciate, I am aware of those designations but this land is already located in a semi-built up area. The park is divided by the road at this point. With all due respect, it is different to the park land on the other side of the road. Moreover, the land was previously offered for this purpose and approval was given for it. I appeal to the Minister of State to use his good offices with his colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Roche, to meet the requests of locals in the interests of all.

The Seanad adjourned at 2 p.m. until 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 7 February 2006.